

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG **DEPTH CHARGE!**

PCZONE

ISSUE 168 **JUNE 2006**

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

BIOSHOCK

Terror from the deep! A chilling classic emerges...

RISE OF LEGENDS

Exclusive review of the fantastic steampunk strategy epic!



SID MEIER SPECIAL!

Three brand new RTS titles revealed by the man himself!

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TINY COMPO
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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

COVER STORY

58

BIOSHOCK

Don't thank heavens for these little girls
- Irrational Games gets wet and creepy

DOMINIK DIAMOND 146

"A basic law of superheroes
is that their breasts have to
be bigger than their heads"



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

LARA'S BACK! BUT IS
MS CROFT'S LATEST
A RETURN TO FORM?

72



MIND GAMES

NOW THEN. WE'VE another packed issue of *PC ZONE* this month, with an exclusive look at the terrifying spiritual sequel to *System Shock 2*, Irrational's *Bioshock*, as well as exclusive reviews and playable demos of *Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends* - the best RTS for over a year - and *Tomb Raider: Legend*, which completes the resurrection of Lara Croft from a spiky pit of rubbishness.

Also this issue, I had the opportunity to catch up with Demis Hassabis, the ex-head honcho of Elixir (see page 142). After his company closed last year, Demis began experiments at UCL into neuroscience research, investigating how autobiographical memory works in the human mind. This may seem like a bizarre sideline move, but the man behind *Republic: The Revolution* and *Evil Genius* believes that if we want games to go to the next level, we're going to need better AI.

This is so true. We're currently obsessed with better game graphics, sound and physics, but what's the point of all this advancement when it's still impossible to hold a believable conversation with a non-player character? The jaw-dropping visuals in titles such as the excellent *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* are obviously great, but if we want our games to become more emotionally involving and have more mature subject matter, we need our NPCs to have more intelligence than a daytime TV presenter. Maybe a few more developers and publishers should consider going back to college?

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



- 58 BIOSHOCK
- 66 RISE OF LEGENDS
- 54 SID MEIER SPECIAL

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 60 words... Pavel Barter snaps into lycra for some speedrunning. An interview with a man called Bo without mentioning Craig David. A medieval expert tuts at some swords, we all *Rise*, Lara shimmies and shakes, and Will meets Sid. Plus hardware, free stuff, *Rome*, advert, this page again (hello), *Bioshock*, toilet break, *Red Orchestra*, Dominik Diamond and rest. Repeat, rinse and relax.

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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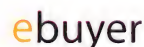
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CONTENTS

REVIEW

66

RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

The RTS gets a welcome makeover!
Goodbye goblin, hello clockwork...

54

UPFRONT

Sid Meier



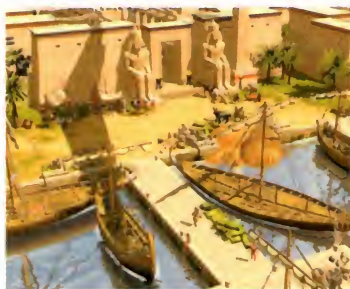
126

FREEPLAY
How To...
D&D

28

UPFRONT

Titan Quest



78

REVIEW

Red Orchestra:
Ostfront 41-45

138

DEV COMMENTARY

Rome:
Total War

AMAZING READER COMPO! 114

WIN!
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FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware

Steve Hogarty likes to keep tiny moths in his wallet, just for effect

FORWARD ALWAYS
Can you resist that intense?

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH
XiaoXiao No. 4

PLASMA PONG
Spewing fluids, long hits and not as innocuous as it might seem

SUPER SECRET NINJA
Flipping out and killing stuff was never funny

CANNON CAT
Flying through the air as a feline hero

FREE GAMES!

118

FREEWARE

Play the latest mods, be more of a *Super Secret Ninja* than you already are, and enjoy the swirliest *Pong* yet

CONTENTS

UPFRONT

- 16 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
- 18 BATTLEFIELD 2142
- 20 SPECIAL REPORT: SPEEDRUNNING
- 22 JUST CAUSE
- 26 FLATOUT 2
- 28 TITAN QUEST
- 32 DARK MESSIAH
- 36 OI! ANDERSSON!
- 38 THE PROFESSIONALS
- 44 REALITY CHECK
- 47 RISE & FALL
- 50 GOTHIC 3
- 54 SID MEIER SPECIAL!
- 58 BIOSHOCK

REVIEWS

- 66 RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
- 72 TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
- 78 RED ORCHESTRA: OSTFRONT 41-45
- 80 TAITO LEGENDS 2
- 80 WAR ON TERROR
- 81 SPELLFORCE 2: SHADOW WARS
- 82 ADVENT RISING
- 83 ROGUE TROOPER
- 83 ACT OF WAR: HIGH TREASON
- 84 KEEPSAKE
- 84 SHADOWGROUNDS
- 86 EVERQUEST II: KINGDOM OF SKY
- 86 BATTLEFIELD 2: EURO FORCE
- 87 PANZER ELITE ACTION
- 87 BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII
- 88 CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS
- 90 INDIE ZONE
- The world of independent gaming
- 92 BUDGET
- Games going cheap
- 95 YOUR SHOUT
- 96 BUYER'S GUIDE

HARDWARE

- 99 NEWS
- 100 REVIEWS
- 102 HOW TO: SHOP ONLINE
- 104 DEAR WANDY
- 106 WATCHDOG

FREEPLAY

- 112 PLAYABLE DEMOS
- 114 DRAGON'S VAULT
- 115 PKR
- 118 FREEWARE
- 120 HALL OF MIRRORS
- 121 HALF-LIFE 2 EMPIRES
- 122 FIGHT CLUB
- 126 HOW TO... D&D ONLINE: STORMREACH
- 129 HOW TO MAKE A GAME
- 130 ABANDONWARE
- 133 NEVERQUEST

LOOKING BACK

- 134 SPECIAL EDITION: PRINCE OF PERSIA
- 138 DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY
- 142 WHAT THE HELL...
- 146 DOMINIK DIAMOND

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April 06



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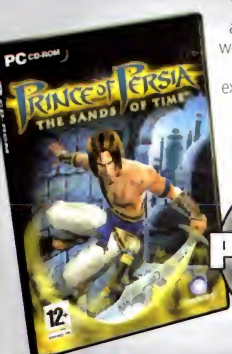
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This is a classic action-adventure game which we described as "a near-seamless gaming experience... Ubisoft has kissed a frog and it's turned into a prince". PC ZONE verdict 84%



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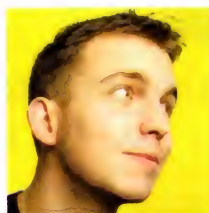
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UPFRONT MEET THE TEAM

Warning: not to be taken orally



WILL PORTER

Deputy Editor

AGE: 26

LIKES: Power and domination

DISLIKES: Finds lack of faith disturbing

FANCIES: Sexy elves and faerie folk

FAVE GAME: *Oblivion*

PLAYING: *Oblivion*

After playing *Oblivion* almost non-stop for 30 hours, Will had developed a condition known as acute *Oblivion*-itis. He now stands in front of wardrobes looking confused and searching for an imaginary spacebar before stumbling into work at 5am completely naked. He then proceeds to pick up any objects of worth in the office before finding a strange man in a back alley to sell it all to. When he's not 'fast-travelling' on the tube, he can be found constantly jumping down Oxford Street to get his acrobatics skill up.



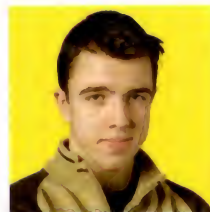
JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Staff Writer

Every morning, Log would come running up to us, eyes like saucers, talking about *Oblivion*. But we looked through his window and saw him sitting in an empty room, crying.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

Oblivion (supposedly)



STEVE HOGARTY

Staff Writer

When asked what he was getting up to tonight, Steve replied, "I'm going to play *Oblivion*." That was a week ago - he's shown up for work every day since. He can go all night and it doesn't affect him.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

Oblivion



JAMIE SEFTON

Editor

After a week of silence from Sefton, we found he'd constructed a fake replica Sefton from cushions and tins of baked beans and placed it in his seat. Real Sefton was at home playing *Oblivion*.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

Nothing, I'm working



DAVE WOODS

Mere Freelancer

We found Dave sitting on our doorstep the other morning clutching a bottle of TCP in a brown paper bag. He was trying to borrow money, so we gave him *Tomb Raider* to review.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

Tomb Raider: Legend



SUZY WALLACE

Reviews Editor

As Suzy proudly aired her new *Oblivion* CD in a park, a sparrow flew straight into it, breaking its neck and denting the CD. Now a giant beak appears through a tear in the game's sky.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

Oblivion (sort of)



KEVIN PRUITT

Deputy Art Editor

Pressed on how people breathe in Atlanta without gills, our lovely new American friend told us that we were actually thinking of Atlantis, the ancient mythical sunken island. An easy mistake.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?

American things, we suppose

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... The caption revolution, excretions of remarkable worth and Nando's again
STUFF THAT'S BEEN OF NO HELP WHATSOEVER... Accidental anti-american insults, rubbish press trips and nights of *Oblivion* adventuring

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

SOMETHING HAS CHANGED 54 Mins We all agree, it really is quite good

HELIUM 23 Mins Apparently inert apart from when at the core of the sun. Apparently

SUZY AND THE STRIPPERS 56 Mins Great admiration for the wide range of expensive, stylish shoes owned by Greek pole-dancers

BIOSHOCK 89 Mins Hogarty is summarily blown away by Irrational. And he remembered his passport

LOG'S DREAM 9 Mins Consisted solely of eating a packet of Skips. When the Skips were eaten, he woke up

INSANE JEALOUSY 67 Mins The annual fight for plane tickets to E3 begins in earnest. Biting leaves blood on walls

FIGHTING FANTASY BOOKS 351 Mins We know all the names, numbers and cover art

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE BOOKS 50 Mins Largely thought of as a bit rubbish. Especially *Who Killed Harlowe Thrombey?*

FREAKY GIRL THINGS 23 Mins Best you don't know about this one really. Bit icky.

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION 1036 Mins Now occupying every waking thought

WIN!

Tiny Compo. Give us the correct answer to the mini-question on the cover and you might win some fabbo prizes. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (168), PC ZONE, Future, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. We'll put them all in a Tesco bag and get Steve to rummage around with his eyes closed and pull one out - just like it's the National Lottery or something. Closing date: April 24, 2006. The winner of Issue 166's Tiny Compo was Jo Phillips from Swansea (see, we're not Welshophobic), who knew that the robot from the movie *Short Circuit* was Johnny 5. Congratulations! Do you have PCs in Wales?

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!

LETTERS

Send *Jamie Sefton* a letter. He likes to pretend he has friends



ACRONYMS LOL

I'm a 15-year-old gamer and have been playing games since the Sega Master System (the good old days). Now I've just started playing PC games, but I don't know what all the abbreviations mean. I know that RPG = Role-Playing Game and FPS = First-Person Shooter, but I'd be grateful if you could explain the others for me.

Jay

Sure, Jay. MMORPG = Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game; RTS = Real-Time Strategy; CSFNAZ = Clichéd Shooter Featuring Nazis And Zombies; ABGFGWGII = Another Bloody Game From Germany

With Goblins In It; TTAWPTMT = Time To Ask Will Porter To Make Tea. Anyone else have any suggestions?

A QUIET LIFE

Last month Sefton asked about our favourite 'no action' moments in games. Well mine is when, after taking 15 seconds to enter *Battlefield 2* multiplayer, I sit on teamspeak and listen to my British Airborne Division clan-mates getting 'no action' waiting to enter the game – which can take some up to five minutes. Dynamo

Long loading times always get me teary-eyed about gaming experiences last century. Five minutes to start playing? Ooh, I used to dream about waiting five minutes...

DAFFODILS, LEEKS ETC

Now don't get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoy reading your magazine – but is it just me or is Wales always left in the dark? I'm talking about your 'A Degree Of Respect' feature in Issue 165 which discussed videogame degree courses, yet failed to mention three – which all reside within Wales! At the University of Wales, Newport (Alt-Yr-Yn Campus) I'm currently studying for a Games Development and Artificial Intelligence Degree (2nd year). Also at Caerleon Campus (also in Newport), they provide an artistic degree on Computer Games Design, and there's a Computer Games Development course at the University of Glamorgan. What's with the snubbing of Wales? We're the part of the UK sandwiched between Scotland, Ireland and England...

Adam Griffiths

Dydd da Adam – thanks for the info. We're definitely not Welshophobic on *PC ZONE*. I spent many a happy summer as a lad on holiday in Criccieth, North Wales; a place we revisited for an eventful mag



team getaway a few years ago. Apart from our Welsh freelancer Steve O'Hagan being threatened in a pub by some thugs who thought he was a 'Saxon stain', we had a lovely time.

TOO MANY GAMES!

I've always only played what I consider quality games with depth. In the past this hasn't been a problem, but now, due to the increasingly high quality on offer, I currently have nine games to play concurrently, with another four I'm considering buying. My problem is this: I have trouble remembering what happened the last time I played a game, as it can be a few months before I pick it up again.

However, I think I have a solution: why not add a 'Previously on...' feature to games, like the kind of thing they have on long-running American dramas? It could be a shortish video showing major plot points or action sequences that have occurred so far. I feel that if *PC ZONE* could just casually mention adding this, then the feature will magically appear in future games (just look at your record of hints to improve games that have made it into actual releases).

Andrew Poulter



WIN!



ONE OF THESE!

You need a good graphics card. We need letters. (Good ones, mind, not rubbish ones like 'PC ZONE rulez, can I have a graphics card please?')

Well, serendipity now! The two needs have collided, right here, right now. Write us a letter today. If it wins Letter of the Month, we'll send you a superb Connect3D X1600 Pro 512MB!

Letter of the Month

OVER THE HILL

I have a major problem. I'm 36 now, but I used to play videogames for hours on end – winning the world cup with Japan on *FIFA* on the Mega Drive for example, or effortlessly beating high scores on *Scramble* in the arcades. However, now I find myself feeling dizzy in online shooter deathmatches, and can't sit and play *X3: Reunion* for more than 30 minutes without getting tired. But the worst is to come. I recently played *Pro Evo* against my mate's eight-year-old son and got hammered 6-0! I can't live the embarrassment down. I'm currently playing *Battlefield 2* and getting blown to bits by adolescents. *PC ZONE*, do me a favour and let me have a new graphics card so a broken has-been can at least look at games as they should appear, rather than how they're supposed to be played. Sniff.

Ian Jones

Poor old Ian. Maybe you're just crap – I'm 36 and regularly beat my younger relations at *Pro Evo*, no problem. Anyway, cheer up granddad – you've just won a top-of-the-range graphics card. You put it in your computer box to make the pictures look nice by the way...



Is there any country where it's legal to kill someone bothering you while you're playing games?

Calm down JA, calm down...

Interesting. I think this would cause too much pain for developers of full, boxed games – however, for the new generation of episodic game releases such as *Half-Life 2: Episode One* and *SiN Episodes*, a brief cinematic *Lost-style* recap would be a great idea. Valve – are you listening?

PC ZONE ROXXOR

I'm writing this letter to express how fantastic your cover DVDs are. Not only do they contain the latest demos, patches and great freeware, but one program included saved my PC from disaster!

Last night I sat down to surf the Web, but adware was blocking every move I wanted to take – the computer fans sounded like a vacuum cleaner when the PC was asked to perform the menial task of opening iTunes. After much hassle, I looked on my computer desk and there was the answer – your DVDZone. I installed and used the Ad-Aware program with ease, removing 816 critical pieces of spyware and adware, and my PC is



Suzy: she does the fabby cover DVD.

now running like new. The wealth of resources on the disk alone warrants the price of the whole magazine – it saved my PC! Now I call on other readers to run this great piece of software... Adam Matthews

Cheers, Adam. It's true that we don't always blow our own trumpet when it comes to the amount of useful utilities on the DVD every month, but it's packed with essential PC software including, as you say, Ad-Aware, plus 3DMark06 (for benchmarking new graphics cards), DOSBox (for running old PC games) and much more. Check out side 2 of DVDZone for the full line-up.

OUT MY HOUSE!

I noticed the other day that I seem to be getting more and more angry when people interrupt my PC games playing. Is there any country I could move to where it's legal to kill someone bothering you while you're playing? JA

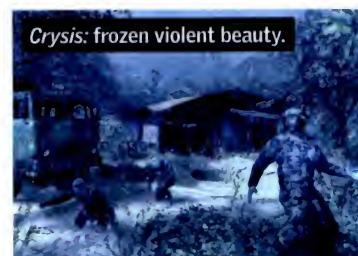
Yeah – probably America. Let us know how you get on.

SEEN HD, DONE HD

With the release of the next-gen consoles, Sony and Microsoft are constantly raving about how brilliant high-definition gaming looks. As far as I can tell, this is where you play a game on a HDTV so that the player is seeing everything at a higher resolution. They also state that texture resolutions will be higher due to the extra memory available. As PC gamers, surely we've had all of this for like, the past four or five years?

Jim Fingleton

'Tis true Jim. US players of PC games have been experiencing true high-definition, surround sound gaming since the last generation of consoles



Crysis: frozen violent beauty.

I've played a thief in *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* for ten levels, advancing in ways that fitted the character. As a result my character is useless now, as the bad guys level up as you do. I struggled to defeat a Goblin Skirmisher at level 4 – I couldn't even scratch one at level 9.

Sekisho

It is totally fair to make combat a challenge for the non-combat player. Conversely, a combat player finds it more difficult to do stealth. Try getting the bonus in the assassin missions as a Destruction Strong Wizard. Not easy. Speakafreaka

If you want to fight toe to toe, make your character a warrior. Otherwise it's your own fault you're getting your ass handed to you. DarthMorbus

The system is fine, due to the on-the-fly difficulty slider. There's no shame in cranking it down – find your sweet spot and enjoy. RaTangPCone
Join in the forum fun at www.pczone.co.uk

MY IRON JUNG

For three years ZONE staff members have worked to craft renowned creator of analytical psychology, Dr Carl Jung (1875-1961), out of metal. A fount of knowledge, fed with gaming data from past and present, he exists for your enlightenment...

DEAR DR JUNG,

Q There's been a *Far Cry* expansion up on the forthcoming games list on Play.com since forever. Why haven't I heard anything about it?
Adam Fenn

A It's presumably due to complex legal ramifications that followed Crytek's decampment from Ubisoft to EA. Although they held the rights to console variants on *Far Cry*'s name, until recently Ubisoft didn't have entire ownership of the *Far Cry* brand – and certainly didn't have the licence to use the CryEngine. Your letter is, however, timely. Ubisoft have now garnered the right to the CryEngine, or at least the iteration of it used in *Far Cry*, so you can perhaps expect a return to Micronesia soon...

DEAR DR JUNG,

Q Call me a platform-obsessed guzzler of souls, but I was always quite partial to the *Legacy Of Kain* games. Will *Defiance* get a follow-up?
Dread0

A Well Mr Dread0, the renaissance of Ms Croft has been occupying the attentions of those who besearf young Raziel at Crystal Dynamics. This does not cancel out the fact that in 2003, test manager Chris Bruno claimed that a sequel was "in the works". Though in my worthy estimation, so-so sales and the departure of *Soul Reaver* brainbox Amy Henning from the development house make it unlikely that we'll see a return to the Pillars of Nosgoth in the near future.



Send your gaming questions and queries to letters@pczone.co.uk

LETTERS



@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ letters, pc zone, future, 2 balcombe street, london, nw1 6nw

was launched. Switching over to smug mode now...

CRYSIS OF CONFIDENCE

My favourite game of recent times is *Far Cry*, so I was understandably excited at the news in *PC ZONE* of Crytek's follow-up effort, *Crysis*. However, am I alone in fearing another *Deus Ex 2* debacle? The suits at EA, the same swine who swallowed and ultimately killed our beloved *Bullfrog*, will be looking at the sales figures for *Far Cry* and multiplying it by the console-to-PC ratio. One would hope that the Crytek team has the stones to tell the marketing pukes that they're going to produce a PC game of *Far Cry*-quality, which can then be dumbed down for the console market, rather than produce the sort of tepid half-breed we've seen too much of lately. Anyone want to take a bet on which will happen?

Tim Bromige

You're obviously a big EA fan, Tim. If it's any reassurance, Crytek maintain a great deal of independence as a developer and are definitely making *Crysis* a PC-lead title. Check out the stunning movie on the DVD and don't miss next month's issue, when we'll have another exclusive feature on this potential shooter classic.

OLD FOR NEW

If publishers can't think of any new games to make, why don't they just



PC ZONE Around the World



We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

update the old classics of yesteryear such as *X-Wing*? Surely people would love to get an updated copy of the classics with all of today's graphical bells and whistles? Craig Jones

Yes, definitely. How many times do I have to say that I'm getting pretty sick of waiting for LucasArts to pull their finger out of their arse and make a brand new *Star Wars* space combat game? Nothing has ever come close to the flight model used in the *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* titles from the early 1990s, created by Lawrence Holland. Sort it out, Lucas!

TRUE BRIT

As a devoted gamer and a lover of most gaming genres, I've now come to my wits' end. Why is every military FPS about the

bloody yanks? I'm not disputing their welcome contributions during the last few decades (although they always turned up late), but why do game developers insist they have the monopoly on winning every 20th-century war ever fought?! We Brits have a long and illustrious military history, and it's about time they looked at other aspects of these world-changing events and gave us some credit. I love my war games, but I'm getting a bit sick of Omaha beach plus every other *Band Of Brothers/Delta Force/Full Metal Jacket* rip-off they tend to use. Come on, let's have some good old Tommy Atkins action, with plenty of cold steel. They don't like it up 'em you know! J Brown (SquadShun)

All the major FPS developers are American, which explains the US bias, but at least *Call Of Duty 2* has a British campaign - even if they do say "wanker" an awful lot. If you're looking for Brit-centric war games, you'd do well to check out the mod scene - there's a Falklands War *Operation Flashpoint* mod in development, for example (www.flashpoint1982.co.uk). Personally, I think it's time for a squad-based shooter based on *Dad's Army*...

IDIOT'S CORNER

Real calls from real idiots...

PCZONE

Hello *PC ZONE*?

IDIOT

Hello, yes. I bought your magazine with the free USB lamp attached to the cover.

PCZONE

Excellent.

IDIOT

But now it's stopped working.

PCZONE

Oh dear. That's a shame... Um... (Looking around)

IDIOT

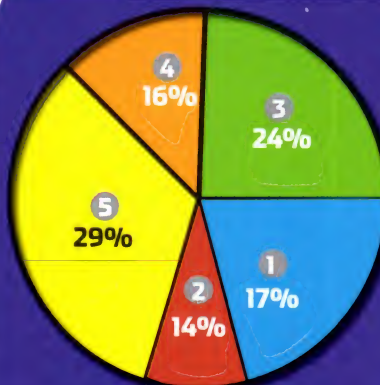
I'd like it repaired, please. Because it doesn't work.

PCZONE

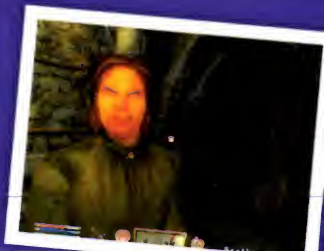
Can I just give you Will's email address? I'm sure he'll be able to help you...

The Big Question

Who are the least popular characters in *Oblivion*?



- 1 Duncan the passive-aggressive lion: 17%
- 2 Patrick Henderson, crow molester: 14%
- 3 Ballsy girl band the Minstrel Cycle: 24%
- 4 Ted Bananas and the Guild of Zaniness: 16%
- 5 Randy burn-faced Kate: 29%



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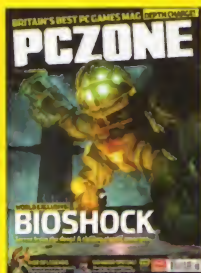
UBISOFT



COVER STORY

BIOSHOCK

PC ZONE exclusively reveal why Irrational's spiritual successor to *System Shock 2* is going to make some waves...



CRUELLY UNDER-APPRECIATED and swept aside by FPS behemoths like *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* is still one of the best RPGs you could ever hope to play. Now, seven years on, Irrational are attempting to do it all over again, (except without being swept aside, obviously). Hulking beasts in scuba gear, beautifully rendered waterfalls and a view from a window which wouldn't look out of place in a David Attenborough documentary about sea urchins – what exactly is going on? Ken Levine is on hand to explain. Also, for fun, why not try counting how many times we mention that it's the next *System Shock*?

PAGE

58



PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

DEPUTY EDITOR Will Porter

TREADING A THIN LINE?

B IT OF A serious column this month. Have you noticed the current trend of kiddywinks appearing in violent games? There's the bloodied footprints of Alma in *F.E.A.R.*, there's the abducted and possessed primary-schoolers throwing each other on spikes in the forthcoming *Prey*, and now we have *Bioshock* – the first game that's actually going to let you pull the trigger on an innocent. In these times of panic over our children's safety and rampant paedophobia in the press, we're certainly approaching what could be considered as dangerous ground.

Is it sick? No, of course not. Stuff like this is meant to challenge us, just as it is in any artform. *Bioshock* contains such imagery and gameplay to force us into making moral decisions; taking our values and beliefs and forcing us to meet them head-on within the confines of the submarine lair that Irrational have constructed. In a book, a gallery or a movie, it's a subject that's fair game (if handled intelligently) – so why am I worried? Because the mainstream media remains unaware that gaming has a conscience. And I can imagine the headlines now.

So should we shy away from controversial subject matter? I don't think so. If publishers are brave enough to pump the stuff out, then bring it on. Without people pushing boundaries, stagnation awaits – and one day the fear-preachers will have to realise that they can't beat us and that they'll have to join us. I'm still glad that I'm not the one that has to go in and explain that to them, though...

WINTER OF CONTENT

ZONE spark up a chat with Obsidian CEO Feargus Urquhart on *Neverwinter Nights 2* and that which lies beyond...

Publisher: Atari | Developer: Obsidian Entertainment | www.atari.com/nwn2

It's been a while since we last saw *Neverwinter Nights 2*. How's everything going?

"Pretty well. I think that in some ways the game was even bigger than we thought it would be to make, so it's been a bigger challenge. Where we are right now – we've finished the implementation on everything – we're basically just polishing, getting everything to work and feel right."

What's the best new stuff you've put in? How have you improved upon the first game?

"The newest feature is companions – we've expanded upon what the first *Neverwinter* did with henchmen. With them, you just hired someone and they did things for

you that you didn't have any control over. In *Neverwinter 2* you have companions – you have complete control over them and on top of that, they're integral to the story. They'll go with you, some could fall in love with you and some could betray you."

We're a bit spoilt for RPGs right now. How will *NWN2* grab people's attention away from the other big-hitters?

"You mean *Oblivion*?"

Well, yeah.

(Laughs) "Because it's different – it focuses on different things. *Oblivion* is adventuring in a world – there's a story, but the story is purely there to give you a reason to adventure in this world.

Neverwinter 2 has two aspects that are very different; while

you're still allowed to adventure in the world of *Neverwinter Nights*, you're really following an epic tale and going through, writing this epic tale and making decisions to deal with it. Like how you're going to react to people, who you're going to help and who you're going to betray. You have more impact on people than I think you do in *Oblivion*. Also, *Neverwinter* just has such a focus on the modding community. They're inherent to it – adding this wealth to the game that I think differentiates it."

With the rise of MMOGs like *WOW*, and your RPG heritage, have you ever considered working on an MMO game?

"Yeah, I've considered it. Brian Fargo – who founded and ran Interplay for almost 20 years – he wanted us to do a *Fallout* MMO, this was in '99 or 2000. I told him that I



STOP PRESS!

LIKE A BAD PENNY

Word on the heavily booby-trapped ancient street is that Indiana Jones will be cracking the whip in new videogame form at E3. Just don't call him Junior.

SONIC EATS FOOT-MAN

Sega have absorbed Sports Interactive, creators of the acclaimed *Football Manager* series, in their current drive for UK development domination.

GATES EATS MOLYNEUX

Microsoft have announced that they are now at one with Peter Molyneux's Guildford outfit Lionhead – purveyors of *Fable*, *Black & White* and *The Movies*.

28

Titan Quest

Diablo crosses blades with the classical works of Homer in Iron Lore's action RPG. It's that brainy.



54

Sid Meier Special

We meet the Wonder of the World himself and try not to hug him too hard or give him kisses.



58

Bioshock

Proof that the ASBO-tagged youth of today aren't half as violent as those of the 1960s...



really liked the idea of doing it, but I just felt it was the wrong thing for Interplay to do – even though it seemed kind of arrogant to tell the CEO that he's wrong.

"MMOs are fascinating, but I think that the difficulty with them – and this is why I haven't worked on one and I don't know if I ever will – is that they're your life and they stay your life; there's no shipping and going on to the next thing. Sometimes I just ask the question of people: 'Are Blizzard Blizzard? Or are they just the company that

makes WOW?" I don't know. I think Blizzard have 1,400 people now, and if they have 1,400 people, then 1,200 of them are working on WOW.

"Other products are just going to get less attention and focus, and there's also the money perspective. It's great to have an MMO that does well and explodes, but it also becomes this beast that has to be fed. It has to be paid attention, petted and thrown meat every once in a while. How do you go onto your next game when you have this monster on your back? Having said all this, I still might... I might accept the fact that the beast is going to be there and we just have to deal with it."



Cry Fly-By

More golden nuggets of *Crysis* info to make you feel all warm and tingly

www.crytek.com | ETA: 2007

BEYOND THE BEAUTIFUL terrain, the dappled shadows, the sprightly power suit, the freeze ray and the wonderment of *Crysis* we revealed a few issues ago, even more excitement has been recently stoking our resident hype machine.

Crytek have let slip that the game's third act (following rumbles in the jungle and the Alien ice sphere) will take place inside the Alien mothership – replete with *Top Gun*-style dogfighting in and out of the billowing volumetric clouds that surround it. Here, you'll first fight the extraterrestrial villains without their gigantic mecha-suits (as seen in the movie lavishly displayed on this month's DVD) – but the reveals don't stop there.

Talk of a CTF multiplayer mode entitled *Power Struggle* has also hit our

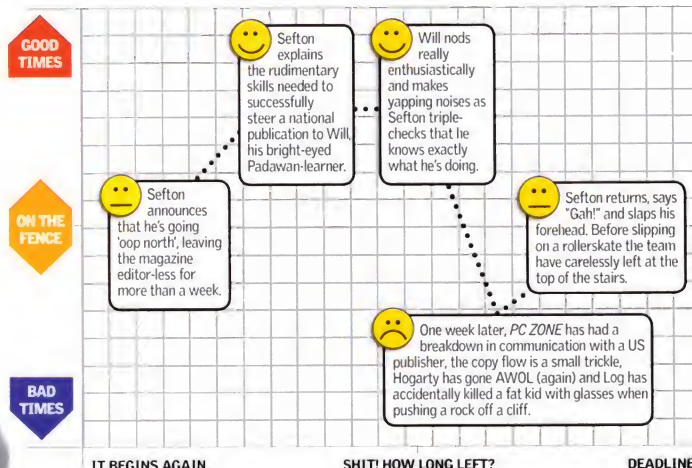
radar – a game packed with skills, objectives and an economy of sorts. A *Quake Wars* rival? We'll know more come E3...



STUFF

A game based on the TV Show *Desperate Housewives* is in the works. Expect a *Sims* meets *Playboy: The Mansion* affair that introduces you, a desperate housewife, to Wisteria Lane and then piles on bunnies, fights, corpses and gardener-nobbing aplenty. Oddly being made by the people who brought you D&D strategy affair *Dragonshard*, it'll probably be rubbish. But we did say that about the TV show as well.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER





Dear Steve,

Everyone's going hoo-ha about massive, free-roaming time-sponge games that swap hours of your life for stories you can't tell in the pub. I'm going to come out, Steve... I've used walkthroughs. I've even bought one in the shops. It was so glossy and nice. I've used walkthroughs and I won't say sorry. Jon Blyth

Dear Jon,

Dear god man, show some initiative – walkthroughs are nature's way of telling you you're an incompetent fool who can't figure anything out for yourself. I bet you're the sort of person who pays attention to the 'Contents May Be Hot' warnings on coffee cups, or looks at the dosage information on prescription drugs. You've no sense of adventure! Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

Give me an interesting puzzle, and I'll solve it. Give me difficult bosses, I'll try to find their weak spots. But some puzzles are illogical, some challenges rubbish. You might be willing to run around in a tedious hunt for a tiny bronze key in what amounts to a metaphor for your own futility, but I'd rather skip the shit and get to the fruity bits. JB

Dear Jon,

Life is full of tedious problems, the solutions to which you can't be spoon-fed. If you refuse to take responsibility for your actions and assert your independence, you'll eventually end up in a wheelchair, shouting at a volunteer worker as you force her to play your games for you. SH

Dear Steve,

Independence? You, who abdicates everything to developers, dares to kick up a whiff about independence? You're a cheerful slave. You slap on the manacles, swing your arms in a low arc and beg for a runaround that'll eat a whole evening. I'm stepping outside the game. My weaknesses become my strengths. I am a wonderful human. JB

Dear Jon,

How dare you question my fierce independence? When the monkeys finally rise up to claim the planet, you'll be at the front of the queue for shackle measurements. Or maybe you'll join them – you'd fit right in. You look like a big ape. With walkthroughs where your legs and arms should be. SH

Dear Steve

How dare you? I'm a ginger polecat, and everyone knows it. JB

FUTURE SHOCK

Mechs and Hoverships in *BF2142*? Has *Battlefield* jumped the shark?

Developer: DICE | Publisher: EA | www.ea.com/official/battlefield/battlefield2/us

IN A MOVE that's cut the *ZONE* team down the middle with a poorly serrated knife, DICE have unveiled a futuristic departure for our beloved *Battlefield* series. Sashaying into view much as *Battlefield: Vietnam* did post-1942, there are two schools of thought on the subject. One says: "Well, I preferred the historical stuff. And it had better not have hoverpacks." The other says: "DICE are taking it pretty seriously actually, there are no hoverpacks," and "Woo! 20ft-tall Mechs!"

The trappings of the future can be arrayed thusly: rockets remain, bullets haven't been superseded by lasers, EMP grenades that disrupt the vision of those clonking about in giant machines abound, and *Predator*-style invisibility cloaks are dispersed among the sneaky (although alas, oh cruel fate, you won't be able to attack when cloaked).

What's happened is that *Blue Peter*'s dire environmental warnings have come true; no amount of tin can recycling has prevented the weather going wonky come 2142 and everything's frozen up. Humanity is fighting for African turf – the American-European forces taking on the Pan-Asian Coalition (Russia, India and the Middle East) while, as is historically traditional, the Africans themselves get very little say in the matter.

The stars of the show, however, will be the Mechs. With anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank guns, mini-guns and legs that go 'stomp', 'stomp', 'stomp', they'll be terrifyingly challenging opposition – only sensibly assailable by fellow Mechs, unless you've planted some special mines that uproot themselves and hover after metallic opposition, or have a pack of sticky-bombs and an invisibility-camo-suit handy. With a vastly improved online matchmaking system and DICE's high-on impeccable track record with all things explosive, you'd be a fool not to keep tabs on it.

Never return to an unexploded firework.



Makes a change from tanks.



Bob the Mech delivers another blast of justice from his groin.



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THE RUNNING MEN

Faster than city-centre purse-snatchers, speedrunners are way ahead of the pack. *Pavel Barter* gets out of breath just talking to them...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

A N INTRO SEQUENCE leaps onto the screen. *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, a world as epic as a Texan's waistline,

a sprawling universe of medieval skulduggery. It's also a game that speedrunner Vladimir Semenov is about to complete in 7 minutes, 30 seconds. Without further ado, Semenov enters his credentials – 'Orc', 'Barbarian', 'The Steed' – the starting gates open and the race begins.

In a matter of seconds, he's murdering, pillaging, levitating across continents, selling stuff to a shopkeeper and then clubbing him over the head and taking it all back. "My time is precious so make it quick," announces one mage, but Vlad has already gone. Watching this is exhausting. It's like getting a piggy-back from Superman while he's reversing time by flying round the world the wrong way.

Just when your head is about to explode, the game's over. Nolan Pflug, speedrunning daddy and host of the infamous Speed Demos Archive, marvels: "*Morrowind* is a big expansive exploration type of game with long quests, and the runner is able to steal, beat up innocent people, fly around

the mountains and complete the game in seven-and-a-half minutes. Now that's good."

BEEP BEEP!

Welcome to the speedrun, a sport where there's always room for another nano-second improvement, where an undiscovered shortcut lies around every corner. Normal time-based games – ie anything involving wheels and a track – have no place here. Instead, runners are drawn to non-linear adventure and action titles, exploiting glitches and turning level designers scarlet with embarrassment.

Vlad the time-impaler later sets another record for *Far Cry*, completing the game in 1:07:02. For us, it's a jungle out there, but for our nippy friend it's a mere walk in the park. "You can drive *Far Cry*'s inflatable boats on land by pressing 'use' quickly... And if you rapidly jump towards certain steep surfaces you can get onto them," he sagely advises.

Then there's the breathtaking 2:14:58 *Half-Life 2* run, conducted by David Gibbons with a little help from his friends at www.hl2dq.tk. "We've managed to skip a lot of talking or at least waiting for the NPCs to do their thing," says Gibbons, who avoids waiting for Gregori in the cemetery, the entire lighthouse

fight and even rescuing Barney from the snipers. Sorry B-Man, gotta dash...

Speedrunning was spawned from the mother of all violent shoot 'em ups: *Doom*. Armed with the ability to record playthrough vids, players set up online fanbases, then discovered that strafe running was exactly 41% quicker than regular running. "Let's go through the levels, really, really, frickin' fast," someone thought, and even the Arch-Vile looked baffled as players ran straight into his pyro so they could reach higher ledges.

BLAME QUAKE

Quake's buggy physics engine led to the first discovery of grenade jumps and bunny hops – the speedrunner's steroid of choice – and in 1997 the community began in earnest when Nolan Pflug started the Nightmare Speed Demos website. "I found some *Quake* files which really impressed me – 'Nightmare 100%' runs of the first few levels – and set out to make a few demos of my own on other maps."

'*Quake done Quick*', released in June 1997, threw down the gauntlet to FPS speed freaks, who began training like boxers before a prize fight. QdQ skipped a large section of The Elder God Shrine level by using a slope jump in the starting room, clocking in a time of 1:21, but



Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



ames don't
speedrunners.



Quake is the speedrun
game of choice.

**"Developers are usually a bit ticked off,
but most laugh it up. Some though,
get offended and patch the game"**

Nolan Pflug, www.speeddemosarchive.com

subsequent demos optimised even further, before Peter Horvath set the current record (0:33) by adding a spectacular grenade jump after spawning in lava.

In 2006, these running men can be found at Pflug's www.speeddemosarchive.com, where they post videos of time feats and discuss tips. Joseph Wilcox, who holds the Marine skill record for *Doom 3* (1:40:10) and *Doom 3: Resurrection Of Evil* (0:52:25), says that friendly competition makes the community tick.

TIGHT FIT

"If there wasn't competition, it'd be boring. Look at *Far Cry*. The first few levels of that game were done over and over again by runners. When someone posted a run, someone else would try to get a better time. Hell, people that weren't even running the game joined in to help get a faster time."

Most runners favour older titles, clocking up times like 1:58:22 on *Diablo 2*'s Assassin mode, or 0:30:24 for

Baldur's Gate, and players still compete on the original *Quake* maps. So how come no-one's tried *F.E.A.R.* or *Call Of Duty*? Is speedrunning a retro crusade?

"Recent games have decreased running speeds and other road blocks because developers are trying to make them more 'realistic,'" explains Wilcox. "These limit runners because you have to conserve stamina and strafe jump a lot."

Finding the shortest route through a level means open season on glitch abuse, and Nolan Pflug readily accepts runs that take advantage of dodgy collision detection or temporary invulnerability. "The only things I don't accept are 'mysterious teleporting' and 'leaving the game's boundary'. Sometimes the latter is hard to define and causes controversy, but the former is definitely looked down upon by most people. Leaving boundaries is more common in 3D titles." Tool-assisted runs, which use emulators to slow the action, are a big no-no.

Unsurprisingly, speedrunning requires practice, time and monastic-levels of patience. Joseph Wilcox approached



Time busters

Speedrunning's finest moments – check out two on the DVD...



Scourge done Slick (Quake)

The QdQ team's hilarious dash is reportedly id level designer Sten Uusvali's favourite movie – with *Quake*'s excellent Scourge of Armagon expansion pack completed in a quite remarkable 22:27.



The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

From arriving penniless at the port to ending Dagoth Ur's reign of terror – all in the space of seven minutes – Vladimir Semenov must have been shaking like a shaved kitten after this run.



Half-Life 2

David Gibbons completed *Half-Life 2* in 2:14:58 – the same time it takes most people to find their first gun. The final battles in City 17 are done so quickly that the music doesn't even have a chance to kick in...



Far Cry

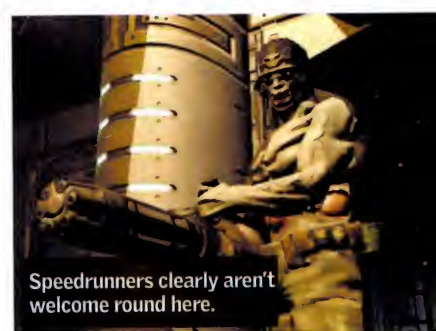
Why waste your time shooting mercenaries when you can run like Forrest Gump? Lots of sequence-breaking, short-cuts, hill-glitch abusing and speedy patrol boats won Vladimir Semenov gold at 1:07:02.

his *Doom 3* run (which featured an impressive rocket jump shortcut in the first Caverns Area) with carefully planned routes. "I played each level over 100 times to get a recording I was happy with. I've also completed the game five times without trying to speedrun it."

ALYX IS A ****

And although this sport is all about balls-to-the-wall speed sensation, there's always room for entertainment, especially during auto-scrolling sections or interactive cut-scenes. Bored of listening to Alyx during *HL2*, one speedrunner mastered the art of writing obscenities on the wall with his crowbar.

As for developers' stance, Nolan Pflug says: "The folks at Valve have seen runs of their games, and Levelord [Ritual's famed level designer] provided his voice for the 'Scourge done Slick' QdQ production in '97. Developers are usually a bit ticked off at themselves, but most laugh it up. Some though, get offended and go so far as to patch the game up."



Speedrunners clearly aren't
welcome round here.

But really, why do they do it? "Simply because we can," grins Pflug. "It's fun to compete with someone else on a run. It's fun to watch games get torn apart with small and large shortcuts, and it's fun to watch the result and wonder 'how'd he do that?'" So next time you're taking a leisurely stroll through a virtual world, try putting your foot down and racing through it like an amphetamine-fuelled bunny. The speedrunning bug may well bite you too. **PEZ**

SLICKER THAN SVEN... JUST CAUSE

Anthony Holden jets off to see Avalanche for a play of Sweden's answer to *Far Cry*. We wonder – would he be so keen if they were based in Hull?

DEVELOPER Avalanche Studios PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE www.justcausegame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 166

THE LOWDOWN

Truly vast jungle environment



20-plus hours of story missions and endless freeform gameplay



Hundreds of vehicles to commandeer



Actual gameplay is very familiar



Essentially a console game with console graphics



ETA
Dec
'06

FORGET CRUSADES AND bloody blitzkriegs – these days the politics of aggression are all about 'regime change'. From Grenada to Panama, from Haiti to Afghanistan, the USA and pals have been ousting uncooperative governments for decades. You might have thought the next target on their shopping list was Iran or North Korea, but you'd be wrong. It is, in fact, a small Caribbean archipelago by the name of San Esperito.

You may not have heard much about it on the news, but this small dictatorship is a key link in the global narcotics trade, and more recently the president has been suspected of harbouring nuclear ambitions. Unfortunately, with the US army's attention focused elsewhere, the normal level of response has had to be, er, scaled down somewhat. Forget your shock and awe, this time it's pretty much just one guy – CIA agent and Latin lothario Rico Rodriguez.

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

It may not sound like the most convincing response to a WMD threat, but rest assured, San Esperito is entirely fictional. What's more, Rico has one or two tricks up his sleeve, including the ability to

commandeer over 100 different types of vehicle (from mini-submarine to Boeing-size jet), as well as leap from one to another and fly through the air like a Latin Caped Crusader (with the aid of his endlessly respawning parachute). With these tools and a little help from his CIA buddy Sheldon, Rico has to drop in, stir up the existing rebel forces and foment a revolution. It's all deeply implausible and rather silly, though in its defence, *Just Cause* is a very, very silly game.

"It's very tongue-in-cheek," says Christofer Sundberg, founder and creative director of Avalanche Studios. "There's lots of humour in the script and the game. It's really kind of boyish, with fast cars, nice girls, stuff like that. It's not *Rainbow Six* and it's not Benny Hill, but it's somewhere in between." It's also a game that's been variously described (by us) as '*GTA* in the jungle' and '*Boiling Point* with a short attention span'. Based on our latest hands-on encounter at Avalanche's Stockholm HQ, we can only confirm these assessments.

In case you missed the last bulletin, *Just Cause* is an immense free-roaming action game set in a seamless jungle environment roughly the size of

Bedfordshire (1,024 square kilometres to be precise). The setting echoes that of *Far Cry*, with lush foliage, mountainous islands and tempting blue waters, while the game design is very much in the *GTA* mould – you have a clutch of essential missions that propel the storyline (21 in total), a vast pool of side-missions that are used to build up your resources and weapons cache, and endless opportunities for freeform horseplay.

"The only part of the game that's hard-scripted is the first mission," says Sundberg. "In it, you HALO-drop down to the beach, then stand in the back of a truck shooting while you get a bit of a tour of the island. But after that it's completely open – you can go anywhere you like, use any vehicle you like, pick up any weapons you like and do pretty much anything you like."

GRAPPLE ME GRAPENUTS

In practice, this means two things. One is messing about with the many different vehicles and the excellent grappling hook device, a new addition to the game that's instantly become its most appealing gadget. Fired at any moving vehicle, it allows you to latch on and hitch a ride – much like parasailing, but behind any truck,

THE STORY SO FAR...

AVALANCHE STUDIOS



AND THEY'RE OFF

Avalanche Studios is officially formed by Christofer Sundberg and Linus Blomberg.

KILLING IN PARADISE

They sell the idea of a Caribbean *GTA* clone to Eidos, and work on *Just Cause* begins.



CAUSE AND EFFECT

Just Cause is unveiled at E3 and work begins on two more games – one being *Just Cause 2*.

BRRRR...

We visit Avalanche for a second time and barely survive the sub-zero temperatures.

2003

2004

2005

2006



boat, car or indeed helicopter. It also allows you to reel yourself in and hop aboard the craft, an act which has significantly expanded the possibilities for insane stuntwork.

You might, for example, steal a car, drive it off a cliff, clamber on to the roof, deploy your parachute, sail down gently to a nearby chopper/yacht/scooter, fire your grappling gun at it, reel yourself in, assume control of the craft and carry on your way. (And why the hell not?) Once you've tired of that (if ever), the other thing to do is look at the mini-map and go to the nearest mission marker – a story mission or side mission, depending on how ambitious you're feeling.

Side missions take in races, assassinations, *Driver*-like 'run the van off

the road'-style encounters and so forth, as well as the slightly more significant 'liberation' missions, where you help the local guerrillas (or drug cartels) turn a settlement over to rebel rule. In the early game, this simply means killing a handful of village cops while they mill around and shoot walls, but when it comes to destabilising cities, there's the potential for a fully-blown war to erupt, with government tanks, helicopters and all kinds of carnage.

GIMME GUNS

In the process of these mini-coups, you not only help destabilise the ruling junta, but also improve your relationship with the guerrillas/cartels, which gives you access to better weapons and new safe houses.



"It's very tongue-in-cheek with lots of humour. It's not *Rainbow Six* or *Benny Hill* – it's somewhere in between"

Christofer Sundberg, creative director, Avalanche Studios



So that's where Lorenzo Lamas ended up...



Things are about to reach 'boiling point'. ROFL!

Jack Carver's dad pops in with some fashion tips.



It's a 'far cry' from your standard action fare. LOL!!!

"When you get to under-boss level with the cartel," enthuses Sundberg, "you get your own jet."

The story missions are slightly more complex affairs, and take in tasks such as 'blow up train with chopper', 'assassinate General in brothel' and 'destroy coca plantations'. We had a chance to play the third mission and it soon became clear that there are, as promised, many different ways to achieve your objectives; although you could argue that they're simply variations on a theme.

A few possible tactics in this instance are to blow the coca to hell with a grenade launcher, commandeer a pesticide truck and poison the crops, fly a crop-duster overhead and spray them that way, or

Leaping Rico

Death-defying feats are all in a day's work for the CIA's top go-to guy



After bailing out of a chopper, cruise down to Earth and fire your grappler at a passing car.



Got one! Now reel yourself in with the Shift key and get on the roof. Hang five!



There's plenty of traffic around, so jump from roof to roof until you find the car you want to, er, 'appropriate'.



This one looks OK, so kick those hombres out and take the wheel. Now, let's go drive off a cliff...



Good to see the medium continuing to mature.



"Now, have I got time for a swim?"

simply drive a truck full of exploding barrels onto the fields and let it do its worst. In the end the result is the same, but, to paraphrase Lib Dem MP Mark Oaten, it's always fun to experiment.

TO START LIBERATION, PRESS A

One thing that becomes abundantly clear at this point is that *Just Cause* is very much a console game for a console audience – even more so than the likes of *GTA*. The combat, for example, is almost ridiculously simplistic. Huge red aiming circles float over targets, ammo rarely (if ever) runs out and health packs fall in profusion and lie uselessly where they drop because you can take so many bullets before you die anyway.

Collisions and physics are also absurdly forgiving. You can drive just about any vehicle, be it scooter or gyrocopter, straight through the thick jungle growth without any impediment, hopping over rocks and sliding through all but the biggest tree trunks. Your parachute can never be snagged on the environment, and helicopter blades can be passed through with nary a scratch.

It certainly means you never become frustrated or slowed down, but it also lends the game something of a dumbed-down, unsophisticated air. "We wanted to make a pick-up-and-play action type of game," explains lead designer Magnus Nedfors. "So we tried to keep it simple, both during combat and while you're driving vehicles."

It's a fair decision given the multi-platform nature of the game, but it's also sure to alienate a lot of PC players,

Water so clear you wouldn't piss in it.



especially those hoping *Just Cause* would be something of a bug-free substitute for *Boiling Point*. In fact, despite the many superficial similarities, they're very different games.

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

The team are also very proud of the technology behind the game, which, apart from the completely open, seamlessly loading world, boasts a detailed world simulation system with dynamically-generated weather (which changes according to actual fluctuations in air pressure, temperature, etc) and a highly autonomous AI populace.

However, the impressive aspect of all of this is that the game is running on everything from a PS2 to the latest PC, and it's on PC that we get the worst end of the bargain. Nedfors admits: "We've always been trying to build a scalable world in terms of graphics, and

Drop your load

You'll never be left high and dry with the heavy-drop feature



Anyone got any scissors?

As you'd expect, making a game in such a vast environment poses some unique problems, not least of which is the high chance of you getting lost or stranded. To avoid this, *Just Cause* offers a simple solution: the heavy-drop. With this feature, you can call in a CIA chopper to drop off a fresh vehicle for you at any point in the game, with the only condition that you're not under attack at the time. At the outset you can only get a dirt bike (or speed boat if stranded in the water), but with gameplay you unlock more interesting options.

Best of all though, you can actually ignore the delivered vehicle and commandeer the helicopter itself – by shooting it with your grappling hook, reeling yourself in and hijacking it. This quickly became our preferred way of getting around the game, and effectively gives you an on-demand airlift any time of day or night. Could do with that in real life come to think of it.

that puts some limitations on the PC version." Indeed, compared to the likes of *Crysis* (revealed in issue 165), *Just Cause* is a distinctly old-gen affair, with slightly underwhelming graphics by PC standards.

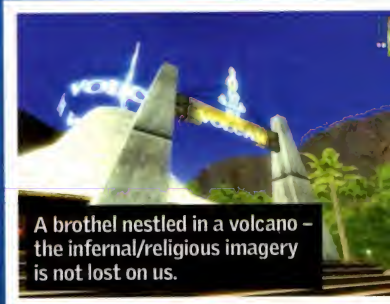
As such, we don't know quite what to make of *Just Cause*. At a height of 1,000ft, it's immense, beautiful and awe-inspiring. Sadly, the closer you get to the ground – and to the realities of the derivative, arcade-tinged gameplay – the less impressive and more familiar it seems. At ground level, the sheer size of the environment is also lost somewhat, especially given the uniformity of the jungle terrain.

The best thing, as ever, is probably to ignore the PR bleating about how this game is going to change your life and accept that it's probably not. However, as a playground for arcade-action and over-the-top stunts, it's certainly going to provide a whole lotta laughs. **PCZ**

An argument over a deckchair gets out of hand.



A brothel nestled in a volcano – the infernal/religious imagery is not lost on us.





FLATOUT 2



DEVELOPER Bugbear Entertainment **PUBLISHER** Empire Interactive
WEBSITE www.bugbear.fi/flatout2 **ETA** June 2006

IF THERE WAS ever a game that evoked the bygone spirit of *Destruction Derby*, then it's *FlatOut 2* – the only game to accurately model real drivers flying through real windscreens (with perhaps an ounce of gravitational artistic licence). With AI far improved on the original's fastidious circuit-makers and what amounts to an extra number of physics items that equals the number of tennis balls memorably driven into and made to bounce around in largely forgotten early-'90s family comedy *Problem Child*, then we've clearly got something to look forward to.

2

The Bigger Picture

1 CARS CRASHING

Here's a picture of some cars crashing. Note how one car has rammed into another, and how it's all been a bit mangled.

2 CARS RACING

Crumbs. We're writing about a sodding car game again. How do we do this week in and week out? It's like Chinese feckin' water torture this.

3 CARS DOING... STUFF...

Man, how many times can you write about someone getting flung through a windscreen? Sometimes you just feel like ending it all don't you? What about god do in this situation?

4 REVELATIONS 9:5

And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented for five months; and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.

5 REVELATIONS 9:6

And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

6 REVELATIONS 9:7

And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

7 REVELATIONS 9:8-9

And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

8 CARS CRASHING

Here's a picture of some cars crashing. Note how one car has rammed into another, and how it's all been a bit mangled.

3



4



5



6



SALLY TAYLOR

PCZONE 27



Garden ornaments: £19.99, B&Q.



A shocking state of affairs in the Orient.



Clip-clop, clip-clop, thud.

CLASH OF THE... **TITAN QUEST**

History combined with mythology? It's all Greek to *Suzy Wallace*

DEVELOPER Iron Lore PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE titanquestgame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 162

THE LOWDOWN

Action-heavy RPG	✓
Lush, detailed graphics	✓
Accessible to all	✓
Advanced, easy-to-use level editor	✓
Combat could induce serious RSI	✗

FROM AESOP'S FABLES to that brilliant one your mate told you in the pub the other night involving your mate's dad's brother's cousin twice-removed, the llama and the marmalade, we all enjoy a good story – and stories don't come much older or grander than those of Greek mythology. Why they haven't been the subject of more games we're not quite sure, but sitting in the conference room of our Athens hotel, we're hoping that a combination of Brian Sullivan's insight – Iron Lore's head honcho – and a stab at playing their historical/mythology-based RPG for ourselves will show us what we've been missing out on.

The first thing that's noticeable is the lack of start-up choices. Normally, RPGs overflow with options when you kick-off, but there's no time wasted here on deciding which class or hairstyle to pick, or what skill to put that last point into, as the only choices you're given at this stage are gender and the colour of your robe. It still takes me an agonising five minutes to decide (hey, I'm a woman!), but I finally plump to deck out my fierce Greek warrior woman in a fetching baby blue.

In the same way Krispy Kreme doughnuts are a feast for the stomach,

Titan Quest is most definitely a feast for the eyes. Far away from the smog and the insane Athens drivers buzzing around swearing at each other, the on-screen action shows a very different Greece to what I've experienced so far. Cypress branches rise into the air, grass parts at my feet as I walk, stone walls mark off fields, shadows dance along the ground and trees wave gently in the breeze.

HERE TO HELP

As I make my way along the paved road, a stranger approaches and asks for my help in rescuing his horse. Since we're about 2,000 years away from the RSPCA helping out, I eagerly dive into the nearby field and polish off the two animal-abusing satyrs (half-goat, half-men) with my bare fists.

Picking up a dropped weapon, I continue along the road and soon come upon a small Greek village where the inhabitants are nervously going about their day-to-day business and local guards stand alert at the village borders. Grabbing hold of a talkative local, I'm informed that their farming land has been over-run by pillaging monsters and they're in need of help.

Unable to shake off my responsibilities as a former Brownie, I hack my way

through the despoilers and eventually dispatch the satyr mage who's been leading the band. Returning as the village hero, I chat to a village elder who points me in the direction of Sparta and the main quest begins.

Leaving the relative safety of the village and heading off into the Greek countryside, it soon becomes clear that although the route to the next main area is quite clearly marked, there's plenty to be found off the beaten track. Enemy encampments, treasure chests, spectacular hillsides offering views over lower-lying bits of landscape (enabling you to see tiny little enemies in the distance), as well as underground caves that demand exploration litter the landscape and invite plentiful lootage.

PUBLIC ENEMY

But of course, such wanders will also bring you into contact with many of the locals, and there aren't that many who you'd class as 'friendly'. "We've got 85 types of creature in game: skeletons, centaurs, cyclops, hydras, gorgons, harpys. Pretty much all the stuff you see in a Harryhausen movie, you'll

ETA
June
'06

THE STORY SO FAR...

IRON LORE

IRON LORE

LIFE OF BRIAN

Brian Sullivan co-founds Ensemble Studios, and the historic RTS *Age Of Empires* is born.



HARD AS NAILS

Brian legs it to set up Iron Lore with Paul Chieffo, and *Titan Quest* begins to take shape.



FULL STEAM AHEAD

After four long years, THQ comes aboard as publisher, giving full funding to the project.

THQ

SEE THE LIGHT

38 people in the Boston office give *Titan Quest*'s gameplay the final wash and brush-up.

1995

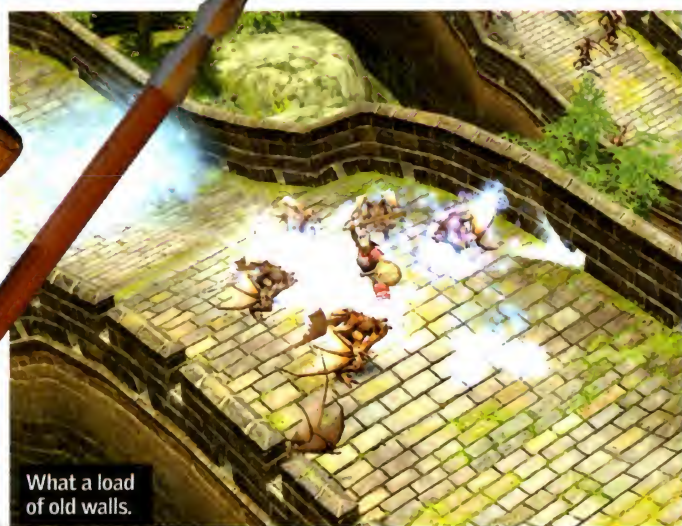
2000

2004

2005

Multiplayer Mayhem

Rope in your buddies with the co-op mode



What a load of old walls.

Aside from the single-player game, Iron Lore's Brian Sullivan says they've designed *Titan Quest* to be multiplayer from the beginning: "We focused on co-operative multiplayer because we think for most people, that's where the fun is – being able to play with your buddies. The co-op play is a lot of fun and we've been building and supporting it since day one."

The customisable class system will also come into full effect when playing with friends, enabling different combinations of skills to complement each other when playing in a party. Iron Lore sees this part of the game really appealing to the hardcore. "We've put a lot of subtle strategies and tactics into the game for the hardcore players to take advantage of, so they're the ones who will want to find just the right class/spell/weapon combinations that will give them an advantage in the game."

see in our game," explains Brian Sullivan, before laying out the 'monster proxy' system that does the hard work of deciding which enemies you should face. "It looks at your level, how many people are in your party, what their levels are and then decides which type of monsters to spawn, how many to spawn and what level they should be."

RECOGNISE THIS?

With Iron Lore having worked hard at a 'tactile' feel, combat is fast-paced and action-packed with multiple enemies, dazzling particle effect spells and opponents you've dealt with catapulting off in comical ragdoll fashion. If you've played *Diablo*, it'll all be familiar stuff (albeit liberally sprinkled with a 21st century dose of graphical splendour), as you click on enemies and watch your character hack them to pieces.

For once, there's also a link between what you see and what you get, so if one of your enemies is wearing a tasty helmet or using a hefty sword, they'll



Jim felt a little left out at the scorpion party.

Wish You Were Here

Even ancient heroes get to take flashy round-the-world trips...



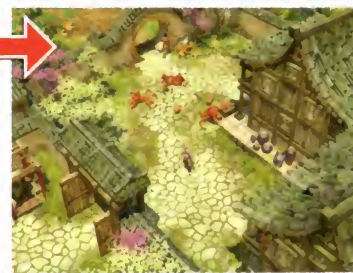
First stop, Greece. Indulged in way too many olives and kebabs (not to mention the Ouzo), fell asleep and got a bit sunburnt.



Next to Egypt. Imposing architecture and a fascinating culture, but that didn't stop me from getting sand in my tunic.



Destination Babylon. Can't help but feel that these huge gardens could do with the odd graffitied bench and empty bottle of Thunderbird though.



Finally, on to China. Huge walls, lots of temples and much Oriental appeal. Hmmm... I'm off to hunt down some chicken chow mein.



drop it for looting once they've bitten the dust. Every once in a while you may also stumble upon a Relic as well; a small fragment of a legendary item such as Achilles' spear, which you can use to enhance your weapons or armour with power from that hero.

GAME OF SKILL

Soon after starting, you're faced with your first of two choices in skill mastery. Choosing from eight options (Defensive, Earth, Hunting, Nature, Rogue, Spirit, Storm and Warfare), your choices define what type of hero you become, enabling pure-bred battle-hardened warriors to co-exist alongside buff-heavy rangers or healer rogues.

Once you've chosen, you can spend your hard-earned skill points on either general mastery which unlocks more of the 20 abilities, or pumping up your lower level skills, expanding and increasing their effects. Gone is the idea that these lower level skills will become useless some way into the game; Iron Lore have concentrated

on making sure that all abilities unlocked early on are made useful throughout the entire game. This will also be clearly represented on-screen.

"Our special effects are scalable, so at the beginning of the game when you only have one point in 'fireball', it's going to be quite a small fireball," explains Sullivan, waving his arms as if he's handling his very own imaginary flaming sphere.

"When you add more points to the fireball, the special effects will get bigger at different levels. With high-level skills, there are sometimes huge pyrotechnic effects that dominate a third of the screen."

Then, without much further ado, we're transported to Ancient Egypt – a level more than a little different, especially with its breathtaking start-up harbour environment. Gigantic ships line the jetty, gorgeously rendered water laps the shores, towering Egyptian statues guard the entrance to main buildings and local wildlife flitters, lopes and strolls alongside the waterfront. Journey further through the sun-baked mud huts of this level and



"The play mechanics are similar to *Diablo*, but *Titan Quest* is a very different experience"

Brian Sullivan, co-founder, Iron Lore



Could do with some Pledge wipes.

Proof that the drugs do work.



Why take one mummy into the tomb when you can take five?

you find yourself battling jackal warriors, giant scorpions and malignant spirits in some spectacular Egyptian libraries and tombs. All this and no-one tries to sell you souvenirs once.

It doesn't stop here either, with other levels plucked from *Titan Quest*'s pack of 24 featuring legends like the Hanging Gardens Of Babylon, with its regimentally organised sections of flora amid trickling streams, peaceful waterfalls, mosaic wall scenes and winged Persian sphinxes. The China level is also a bit of a looker with its ornate oriental palaces, cherry trees in blossom and even the first game setting to be visible from space – the Great Wall.

MOD GOD

As is the fashion with such hack-and-slash beasts, *Titan Quest* is set to ship with an advanced level editor which will give the mod community their chance to create any tall tales they feel have been missed out.

Sullivan is quick to sing its virtues: "It's the most powerful and easy-to-use editor that's been released yet, so we're hoping

that people do create a lot of content." He also divulges that: "We've already had people actually talking about re-creating every single mythical story in ancient Greece using the editor." We're keeping our fingers crossed for a Clash Of The Titans mod...

The only piece of the jigsaw left is the storyline, about which Iron Lore are keeping decidedly tight-lipped. We did manage to gather that the Titans (gods before gods) will feature, as they have escaped from their eternal prison to wreak merry havoc upon the world and its inhabitants.

Sullivan also confirms that, "you'll be kicking some Titan butt by the end of the game", so it looks like the story will (again) depend upon your hero going all out to save mankind and the Earth. Luckily, Iron Lore have brought in some writing talent in the form of Randall Wallace (screenwriter for *Braveheart* and *Pearl Harbour*), so at least the story that ties everything together should be an epic yarn.

Titan Quest's beautiful looks, easy-to-use combat and lack of gore are bound to

attract players of all ages and abilities to the game. However, we have our reservations about how much the mechanics of a ten year-old game will still appeal, but Sullivan is adamant that the tried-and-tested formula will work just as well with today's gamers.

"The play mechanics are similar to *Diablo* because it's been established that it works. You don't break something just to be different – and if you look at the skills, the bosses and the places you go to, you can see that *Titan Quest* is a different experience." Only time will tell whether Iron Lore's belief in the undiminished appeal of *Diablo*-play will prove correct, but whatever the case, our large, unblinking Cyclops eye will remain focused on the project. Unless *Titan Quest* stabs out that eye while we're sleeping and escapes from our cave pretending to be a sheep. **PCZ**

**COMING
SOON...**

DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Steve Hogarty's not the *Dark Messiah*, he's a very naughty boy

DEVELOPER Arkane Studios PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE www.mightandmagic.com/us/darkmessiah/teaser

THE LOWDOWN

Hugely enjoyable combat	✓
Looks beautiful	✓
Emergent gameplay	✓
Great use of physics	✓
Perhaps too simplistic for hardcore RPGers	✗

THE MOUSTACHIOED gentleman from Ubisoft with the monocle and top hat shouts: "One-point-three-million dollars!" The gasps of the auction house dissipate into a wave of shocked whispers and murmuring. That's probably exactly what happened when the *Might And Magic* licence bouquet was chucked into the air by 3DO and consequently snatched by the French publisher. What happened afterwards was pretty special too, with Arkane Studios taking up the *Might And Magic* reins and kicking some life back into that dead RPG horse with a well-placed FPS spur.

After a recent trip to their studio in Lyon, Arkane made it clear to us what *Dark Messiah* is all about, and moreover what it's not all about. Obvious parallels will be drawn with recent RPG epic *Oblivion*, but those parallels will be misguided, looking more like tangents or right angles than parallels.

Dark Messiah belongs to the subset of genres suffixed by 'with RPG elements', in effect being a first-person adventuring

game which allows you to learn new skills and powers as you progress through the game's sequential level structure. RPG tenets such as looting corpses and collecting gold, while present, simply aren't prominent, the focus instead turning to a more physical and visceral depiction of melee combat.

VIEW TO A SKILL

Arkane are also pushing for emergent gameplay in *Dark Messiah*. There are no classes or set roles – instead, you simply play however you want to play, using the skill points you earn for completing objectives to improve your abilities in whatever area you want. Abilities range from skills like improved sneaking and telekinesis to the ability to disarm your opponents or magically shrink them. That's right, shrink them and then squish them with your foot as they run off screaming with high-pitched voices. Or you could pick up a flask of oil and chuck it at a necromancer as he charges his fireball attack, setting him and those around him on fire.

Kuju, a developer best known for *Battalion Wars* on GameCube, will be providing the multiplayer portion of *Dark Messiah*, which will involve five connected maps spanning from a human stronghold at one end to an undead stronghold at the other. Victory for either team results in the map shifting one notch towards their opponent's base and ultimate victory. With 32 players per server, massive city walls to launch volleys of arrows and magical attacks from and huge siege towers to scale and conquer those walls with, the multiplayer aspect of *DM* should be of significant interest to RPG and online FPS fans alike.

With a truly hands-on and open-ended attitude towards combat and level design, *Dark Messiah's* strengths will lie in the challenge of finding your own way of completing the various quests. That, and the sheer joy of lopping off an orc's head and seeing it arc through the air, freezing the floor and watching a bunch of goblins fall on their arses, or firing an arrow from the shadows and pinning an enemy to the wall. The choice is yours.

ETA
Summer
'06

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

FEAR FACTOR

Just like chavs, goblins tend to run off when you threaten them, only to then lure you into such a position that they can drop really large and heavy statues on you.

MAGIC ROCKS

No longer the exclusive forte of igneous rocks such as pumice, floating about can be achieved by pretty much any small object as long as a suitably skilled wizard points his hand at it.

FLAMING LIPS

When not shooting from your fingertips, fire can be found loitering in dungeon corners. You can use fire to set your arrows alight too, with hilarious effect.

YOU HAVE DIED

Death is a harsh reality in both the real world and the virtual. But in this world, you can hurl the dead bodies about with telekinesis. Hoorah!

ON HAND

A smorgasbord of magic spells is on offer, from fireballs to lightning bolts. A smorgasbord is a Swedish buffet meal with a variety of hot and cold dishes.



You can shrink opponents, then squish them with your foot as they run off screaming

We've got a *Dark Messiah* movie on the DVD too if you're interested – go on. It's got a cyclops in it.





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UPFRONT **OI! WHAT'S YOUR GAME?**



ANDERSSON!

WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

Jon Blyth, lover, fighter, gymnast; Bo Andersson, producer of the third *Ghost Recon* and military expert. Which man is lying?

Who are ya?



NAME Bo Andersson
DEVELOPER Grin Software
POSITION Producer
AGE Spry at 31
GAMES WORKED ON BEFORE
Ballistics (racing game),
Bandits, *Phoenix Rising*
FAVOURITE GAME
Black Hawk Down

Q What was the first game you worked on?

A "We first made military simulators, but that wasn't for the games industry. That was for the military – battle plans, stuff like that. It's full circle, really."

So you're a military-minded man – did you have a previous interest in the Clancy novels?

"Yeah, I read all his books. I was in the Special Forces for two years, so that gives me a bit of... Well, that was the entry into the game. For me, doing the *Ghost Recon* games is quite exciting, and Ubisoft seem to have a lot of trust in us, in terms of developing the AI and combat situations."

I was going to ask what professional advice you took, but you are the advice...

"Yes, and I have good connections in the army, so we could do real scenarios and military weaponry."

So have you had any feedback from your friends in the military about the game?

"We had a playtest some time ago. They think it's quite realistic, but not too much, obviously – it needs to be teen-rated, so there needs to be a balance. You have to be ethical and you need to stay gameplay-focused. I think we really succeeded too, especially with the AI. Your team-mates don't really make mistakes. You can see them taking up position, taking cover, altering their behaviour depending on what you do – staying in a group, flanking you, stuff like that."

"You finally have the ability to trust your team-mates – usually, you have to babysit your squad members, but finally you can trust them. Also, you can control them individually – that's

"I was in the Special Forces for two years, so that gave me an entry into the game"

one big difference in the PC version – you have more control over your squad."

Are there any other ways in which the PC game is more tactically involving?

"The enemies are more vicious – they work in groups, and they work dynamically – so if you change the environment, like if you blow up a gas tank or move a car, they recognise this and change their tactical approach. You can't move cars in the 360 version. So they adapt, use covers, sit as tight as possible, lean out – and if you shoot at them, they pull away."

The 360 version is flying around now and it's a bit of a tease – why's the PC game taking so long?

"It's two different games. The only thing they share is the story and videos – everything else is built from the ground up. They're totally separate, so Ubisoft are giving the fans two experiences. I'm very happy to be working on a separate PC game and not a console port – I think that was a really good decision."

It's set in the near-future, so there's a whiff of gadgetry about it – what's your favourite feature in the game?

"I like the tactical map – it's a satellite view that lets you see the whole battlefield in 3D. So it's not a regular map, it's the real thing. You can zoom



in and out, and see your team in the area. It makes a great spying tool, plus you can set up flags and orders. So if you want to plan an ambush or retreat, you can move your guys around and set them up with cover or attack orders."

The lead character's name is Scott Mitchell. Don't you sometimes wish his name was Tony Killfingers?

"You've got to settle for what you're given. You can wish all you want, but you can't walk up to Tom Clancy and say, 'About this guy's name'..."

So is there any one-upmanship among the Clancy games developers?

(Laughs) "Totally – it's a big competition. Even more so for us, as we're a third-party team. It's really inspiring that we've got to go up against the other guys."

Finally, what's your favourite moment of the game?

"It's a general moment, where you actually sneak up on an enemy, he recognises you and you can send your team-mates around individually to flank him. They come in around the sides and you squeeze the guy out of

cover. It's great that I'm able to use those kind of tactics without them being scripted, and that I have the genuine feeling of commanding a small unit." **PC7**



BO ANDERSSON

What milks Bo's creative nips

SPECIAL FORCES GUERRILLA WARFARE MANUAL
SCOTT WIMBERLEY

BOOK: *Special Forces: Guerilla Warfare Manual*. Not exactly light reading, but "a big inspiration".



GAMES: *Black Hawk Down*. For Bo, it's a case of chopper love: "A great game."



MUSIC: *Full Metal Jacket* soundtrack. "We also listened to Jamiroquai," he tells us.

THE PROFESSIONALS

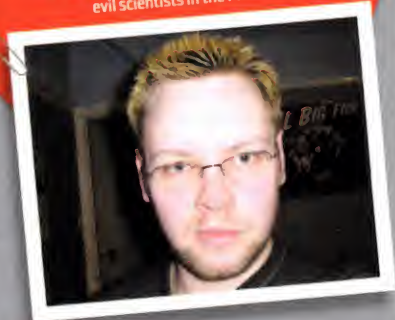
Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

WHEN NOT CLAIMING that apples give you cancer or working for giant corporations who want to find a statistic that suggests that cigarettes are good for you, scientists do good stuff too – like growing ears on mice or making caged monkeys look pretty in make-up. These good scientists, such

as *ZONE* reader Joseph Scott, get rightfully miffed when they're portrayed in the media as cruel, heartless bastards. Tragically, games provide some of the best examples of this anti-science thinking – and it turns out they hardly ever get their facts right. Over to you, Joe...

**THIS MONTH:
CLONING, MUTATION
AND BIOTECHNOLOGY**

Expert: Joseph Scott **Job:** Accomplished student of biotechnology **Company:** Procter & Gamble
Specialised Pedantry: The work of evil scientists in the FPS



F.E.A.R.: CLONE ARMY

"As frightening as it sounds, creating the perfect soldier using recombinant genetics, then cloning the template to create an army is possible. Given enough

money and time every element of our genome will one day be cracked, and once we have that gene library it would be possible to design yourself your own tailored army. Increased reactions, muscle density and sense perception are also all possible. Not so sure about the psychic bits, but you could see the rest within the next 20 years or so."

PCZONE



The army of tomorrow



REPUBLIC COMMANDO: CLONE ARMY #2

"Despite our individual DNA, the stuff that happens when we're growing up has a huge impact on our personality and makes up for the other half of what makes us who we are. It's possible to influence anything with genetics once you know the codes, and with the correct training from an early age you can make the most of individual genes. As for clone accents not being 'Jango' Kiwi, it may be due to later exposure to other accents around the Galaxy."

PCZONE



Almost correct



QUAKE IV: THE STROGG

"This lot are a bit better – essentially advanced prosthetics. Then again, I'd give you about a 5% chance of surviving the Stroggification scene – technically you'd go into shock, your blood pressure would drop, your kidneys would no longer work and you'd poison yourself. Another issue with these implants is that they're connected directly to muscular and nerve tissue; they'd cause an immune rejection – causing death or the fancy new legs to simply fall off."

PCZONE



His legs would fall off



FAR CRY: TRIGENS

"You're stuck with your own DNA. You can alter that of an embryo because there are so few cells, but it's impossible to inject something with a formula that changes a

body so drastically. Current gene therapy works around changing only one gene, and that requires massive amounts of immuno-suppression to avoid rejection – plus it doesn't work in humans yet. With Trigen, huge size-change demands massive skeletal rearrangement and increased organ size. It would also demand an extra heart to support the circulatory system – a normal human heart would not be good enough and suffer pulmonary failure."

PCZONE



Bad shirt, bad science



HALF LIFE 2: HEADCRAB ZOMBIFICATION

"Look at the bloody big hole in its chest! That heart would not work; neither would the lungs and talk about infection! That thing is guaranteed dead. A headcrab is a parasite that latches on, kills the guy, uses his body – right? Not going to happen! Two words: rigor mortis. If you've ever seen a corpse or had to handle one, they're bloody stiff and impossible to position until rigor mortis wears off. This means the crab would have to try and manipulate muscles or nerve endings to make the body move – the problem is these pathways degrade after 48 hours. Zombies simply cannot work – when you die you stay dead!"

PCZONE



Gordon is a moron

WINNERS: Republic Commando and F.E.A.R.

Recent efforts to clone sheep into soulless killing machines means that the tech-killers of tomorrow are bound to be clones – although not necessarily psychic ones, or ones that hail from New Zealand.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional knowledge or anally retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

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If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.



CHASING THE DRAGON

Plucky Brit outfit break into the MMO scene with martial art affair *9Dragons*

www.9dragonsonline.com | ETA: early autumn

GRINDING. DULL ISN'T it? A relentless chore of wandering around, hitting things and eating things to stop yourself from dying. Just like real life, only without the underlying sexual tension. But what's that noise? (Cue clash of gongs and pretty serving girls skittering in, bowing coquettishly.) Why it's only a new MMO company, a sapling grown of Codemaster stock, who are using the secrets of the East to relax the boredom of daily XP gathering. Now admittedly, some of the visuals here are rather lo-fi, but pay attention as it is rather interesting.

"The fighting style in *9Dragons* moves the game from the traditional key-hitting, monster-killing grind into tactical warfare," explains Persistent Worlds man Jon Latham. "You have to choose the right combination of moves to defeat each monster you face. These martial skills have to be learned at a training school where up to 400 different moves per clan are introduced, through tuition and mini-games." Seeing as there's such a vast range of moves even within each of the six clans, you'll essentially develop your own unique way of fighting that'll add more than a fair wodge of spice to PvP.

Taking place in an Ancient China packed with Great Walls, Shaolin Temples and



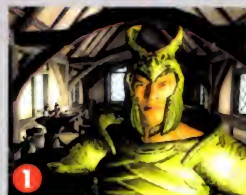
authentic bits and bobs – the developers have even spent time in the Far East talking to fighters about their requisite fighting styles (our favourite being Drunken Monkey Style), and how they would have been used during the time of the Ming Dynasty.

Monsters and bandits won't be mindless fodder either, being liable to fight among themselves as well as against your good self, and even earn strength points should they vanquish you. They'll also be the first MMOG kill-harvest to have ever been given the option to top themselves rather than win you XP. It's all to do with honour, y'see. While we're a mite concerned at the graphical prowess on show, there's undoubtedly fuel for a novel MMO experience – after all, you can't go far wrong with kung fu.



PCZONE CHARTS ChartTrack

- 1 **NEW** **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
Issue 167 95%
- 2 **NEW** **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 3 **NEW** **LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II**
Issue 167 71%
- 4 **NEW** **THE GODFATHER**
Issue 167 50%
- 5 — **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 6 — **WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
Issue 152 95%
- 7 ↓ **STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR**
Issue 166 85%
- 8 ↓ **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006**
Issue 162 90%
- 9 **NEW** **COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE**
Issue 166 73%
- 10 ↓ **ROME: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION**
Issue 148 93%
- 11 ↓ **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 12 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 13 — **BATTLEFIELD 2**
Issue 157 94%
- 14 **NEW** **COMMAND & CONQUER: THE FIRST DECADE**
Issue 167 N/A
- 15 **RE** **GUILD WARS**
Issue 156 94%
- 16 ↓ **CIVILIZATION IV**
Issue 162 92%
- 17 ↓ **F.E.A.R.**
Issue 161 90%
- 18 ↓ **TOCA RACE DRIVER 3**
Issue 165 85%
- 19 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY**
Issue 153 57%
- 20 ↓ **CALL OF DUTY 2**
Issue 162 91%



1 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Somehow better than the entire *FF* series, *Oblivion* provides the greatest fantastical kicks money can buy.



2 THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS

This amazed us with its daring dip into mild playability – it's like we're small children again, or housewives.



3 LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

Not as good as before, but peerless compared to some games we could mention (*The Godfather*, whoops).



4 THE GODFATHER

You could have waited to see what we had to say, you know. Because this is crappy on PC. For shame PC owners of Britain. For shame.

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British Airways to axe over third of its managers
British Airways (BA) chief executive Willie Walsh (AFP) British Airways/File
LONDON (AFP) - British Airways is to get rid of more than one third of its managers over the next two years under a restructuring programme that aims to slash costs across the group.

The job cuts of almost 600 managerial posts, or 35 percent of the total, were set to save the airline 50 million pounds (73 million euros, 86 million dollars) as part of its drive announced in January 2004 to achieve a 300-million-pound cost reduction programme by March 2007, BA said in a statement Wednesday.

The restructuring will see a total of 597 management posts lost by March 2008. The number of senior managers will be reduced by half to 207 and there will be a 30 percent reduction in the number of middle managers to 911 from 1,301.

UK News

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Hurricane Katrina to cost Lloyd's 1.9 billion pounds
Residents made through a flooded street in New Orleans
(AFP)File James Nielsen

LONDON (AFP) - Lloyd's, the world's biggest insurance underwriting market, raised its estimated pre-tax loss from Hurricane Katrina to 1.9 billion pounds (2.8 billion euros, 3.3 billion dollars) from 1.4 billion. Lloyd's also forecast that Hurricane Rita would cost it 535 million pounds and that Hurricane Wilma would add 483 million to the total.

As a result, the market said that chances of posting a profit for 2005 were weak.
"The net loss from Katrina is now estimated at 1.9 billion pounds," Lloyd's said Wednesday in an official statement.
"This compares with the provisional estimate of 1.4 billion given by Lloyds on 14 September which was based on the very limited information available at the time."

Business-News

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Today Tomorrow 2 Days 3 Days 4	
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Chance of Precipitation:	UV Index:
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THE MAN WHO KNOWS



Fans of the habitual and international sport of **urinating upon a cigarette butt** to expedite its exit from a stinking trough in the gents of **unsavoury watering-holes worldwide**, will be delighted to hear of *On Target*. A computer game that wallows in the depths of a urinal and, upon sensing the **gentle, golden pitter-patter of piss** upon its top, gauges its flow and pressure and **translates the slash of the discerning gentlemen into both sounds and pictures**. Its designers, widely expected by commentators to be **louche and trendy**, have claimed their creation to be a **'critical-ironic measure, questioning the concept of art, but extending it at the same time.'** Indeed, **Is art piss? Or is piss art?** Another boon to the in-urinal entertainment device is that (it has been indicated), it will discourage men from relieving themselves on the floor, up the walls and in pint glasses strategically placed around pubs. 'The reduced size of the **'target' improves rest room hygiene and saves on cleaning costs,**' explained the creators to a crowd of low-paid immigrant cleaning staff looking on in **abject bemusement**. Rumours of a **submarine depth-charge game experience** based on human excretion are expected to be confirmed within the month.

Crucifixion, the method of populace control favoured by Italians of times past, is coming **back into vogue**. Much to the delight of those who've been demanding a return to more traditional veins of corporal and capital punishment, *Roma Victor*, a massively multiplayer game that recreates the somewhat gloomy era of Roman Britain, is bringing back the punishment of nailing someone to a cross, **cutting their chest in half to check if they're dead** and making them drink vinegar on a sponge. Their first victim, a 27-year-old electrical engineer from Flint, Michigan, has been tried and found guilty of the **cardinal sin of ganking**. **Cynewolf**, the ganker and killer of noobs, will now have his **avatar nailed to a large lump of wood** outside the town of Corbridge for seven days. After his punishment, it's thought his 12 friends will be delighted to see him back, although one will doubt his story.

"Cynewolf, the ganker and killer of noobs, will now have his avatar nailed to a large lump of wood"



WAR: STILL HELL

AC/DC and Nazi Germany blamed as *Brothers In Arms* ventures onto *Hell's Highway*

www.brothersinarmsgame.com | ETA: 2006

EVER THE GAME series most liable to provoke the *ZONE* readership into separating in two and beating each other with sticks, those *Brothers In Arms* are back: and this time they've brought Unreal Engine 3 along for the ride on *Hell's Highway*. The key change, apart from fancy graphics and the newly nine-fingered 'Red' Hartsock, will be the introduction of a third fire team for you to order about – a deployable,

dependable, slow-moving group of machine-gunners who'll, without doubt, bring added levels of complexity to the puzzling hedge, field and shed arrangements of *BIA* tactical warfare.

Ever keen to underline the sides of warfare that aren't fun, meanwhile, Gearbox have included such humanitarian disasters as the German bombing of Eindhoven, in which 227 sleeping innocents were killed. More on *BIA:HH* next issue.

AFTERTOUCHED BY THE HAND OF GOD

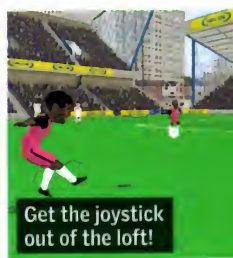
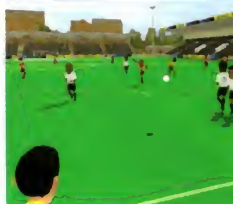
***ZONE* goes hands-on with *Sensible Soccer 2006*! Back of the net!**

www.codemasters.co.uk | ETA: summer

OH, SENSIBLE SOCCER... You could have gone either way. You could have been a heartbreaking kick in the nostalgia, and shovelled grit onto the face of joyful gameplay. You could have killed misty-eyed gaming forever. But you are none of these things, you seductive munchkin. You are brilliant.

We've had a quick kickabout on the updated version of this masterpiece, and we can say with no trace of moderation that it's going to be damn fine. Same simple-deep gameplay, even more charm, humour and all-round loveliness. PS: Jon Blyth drew Jon Hare 4-4 and is the best Jon ever. IDST.*

Roll on the summer!



*For a full explanation of what 'IDST' and other schoolboy terminology means, then why not purchase *The Law Of The Playground* by Jon 'Log' Blyth? Now available from all good online retailers, and some bad ones, *PC ZONE* give it three thumbs up!

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:



The man who's giving the MMO a fuel injection

SCOTT BROWN - PRESIDENT OF NETDEVIL

Scott Brown's previous work includes *Jumpgate*, an MMO space simulator that he couldn't believe no-one had already made, and a German game he prefers not to talk about. He's just putting the last touches on *Auto Assault*, a high-speed driving MMOG that replaces potions with motions, and the only demon is 'de Mondeo over dere'.

Q So MMOs have always been your passion?

A We always wanted to make MMOs – that was the whole idea. I loved *Wing Commander*, *X-Wing* Vs *TIE Fighter* and *Elite*, and you just wondered what if these other ships had real people in them? So we made *Jumpgate*, which was enough of a résumé to get us in with NCsoft for *Auto Assault*.

So how does *Auto Assault* set itself apart from the traditional MMOG?

The most obvious way is the pacing. We wanted to mix the adrenalin of action gaming with the long-term development of a character. So you still have statistics and attributes on your weapons, and there are dice rolls on your attacks...

But your own skill is important too?

Well, it's not the same accuracy as a FPS reticule, but everything's moving and you actively have to keep your enemies lined up.

Any other innovations?

We run physics on the server, which as far as I'm aware we're the first to be able to do,

so we can have destructible environments. The examples I always give – why does a fireball in a forest not set fire to the forest? Why is your character limited to only interacting with other characters?

How will you be able to customise your car beyond the obvious weapons and armour?

We have the tricks and trims system. There's paint jobs and accessories like carbon fibre scoops and glowing siderails that you can find and attach at shops. The idea is to keep the statistics away from the look, so you're not stuck with a certain coloured car because you want a certain armour.

So what kind of action lies in wait for people as they progress to the higher levels?

The top level is called Ground Zero and that's where one of the alien pods splashed down. The remnants are still there, so it's still generating these terraforming alien vehicles. There's also the outposts, where the races fight each other for territorial control. This is where the open warfare really takes off.

So are you going to get a chance to relax soon?

Between the last patch and launch, yes. But this is one of the cool parts of working with MMOs. You actually start work at launch. You have to react to players, look at what they're using and give them new content. The development never stops and that's the fun thing.

It sounds more like a Greek curse than fun.

I guess that just depends on whether you love what you do.



No unicycling vehicles have been unveiled as yet.

LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

Times are hard at *ZONE* Towers. Once upon a time we would proudly visit friends and family clad in caps, T-shirts and military paraphernalia that we'd extorted from the game marketing machine – and everyone we met would see our *Codename: Panzers* floppy hat. Now we're forced to sell all our free stuff on eBay under the tag PCZoners, and the smidge of happiness we get from supporting charity is nothing compared to the bleakness of tat-free existence.

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity, mate...
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



THIS MONTH'S TAT



LMA MANAGER 2006 TINY FOOTBALL
Very tiny. Slightly bigger than an eyeball.



THE GUILD 2 STANDARD
A flag on a pole to celebrate medieval sims.



SID MEIER'S RAILROADS! CAP
All aboard for the hat of locomotive wonderment!



EMPTY PINEAPPLE JUICE CARTON
Not the best month for tat, really...

THE TAT BOARD

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	SIGNED COPY OF LULA 3D They're our signatures remember, not Lula's. But 15 quid is good for an atrocious foray into German onanism.	£15.21	14
	DUSTY GTR CAP Now one lucky reader can wear it once and leave it on their desk for a year. Just like Suze did.	£21.00	10
	KING KONG GAME POSTER My God, what an absolute steal. If you could buy this in the shops then it'd be at least a fiver! Never say we don't give you anything...	£2.20	7



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06

The world's greatest golfer meets one of the world's worst. *Steve Hill* gains an insight into being Tiger Woods

IT'S A MUGGY Monday morning in New York's Central Park – which actually features in *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06* as a fantasy course – and I've been granted an exclusive audience with the great man himself. Exclusive that is apart from at least a dozen interested parties analysing every word, each ready to blow a metaphorical whistle should the quadruple-checked questions veer off topic. Furthermore, I've been instructed to remove my Puma top for fear of offending the Nike representatives. Luckily, I'm shod in the Swoosh, otherwise the interview may have had to take place barefoot.

Given the absurdly exacting build-up, it's a surprisingly low-key entrance from a sharp-dressed and unbranded Mr Woods, who ambles in unannounced, pours himself a glass of water, sits down and introduces himself as "Tiger" through unfeasibly white teeth.

In the game he appears as a sullen latex-skinned robot in a pair of high-waisted grey slacks. In reality, with his outlandish hairstyle and laidback demeanour, he seems more surfer than golfer, liberally using the word "dude" and peppering the conversation

with descriptions ranging from "pretty cool" to "really neat".

Woods has been the dominant face of golf for so long that it's easy to forget he's only 30, and thus comfortably within the videogame-playing demographic, something he confirms by reeling off his earliest gaming memories.

"Oh, I've been a gamer all my life," he says. "I remember as a kid we played Atari 2600, then the 5200, then Nintendo and all that stuff. Back in the day it was *Pong*, then it became *Frogger* and then *Dig Dug*, *Galaga*, *Donkey Kong*, stuff like that."

SWEET SPOT

It's all a world away from the ultra-realistic *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06*, the latest incarnation of the game that Woods has lent his name to since 1999. Endorsing a game was an opportunity he readily accepted, although he says: "It felt awkward having my own game in the sense that I'm actually part of a game. I've always played games, but never ever envisioned myself being in a game."

In the game he most certainly is, having squeezed into the obligatory

motion-capture suit. "It's pretty tight," says Tiger, "but at least it's not as tight as it used to be, and it's become more forgiving in the right spot..."

The efforts would appear to have been worth any discomfort, and Tiger is more than happy with the end result. "I'm especially impressed by the swing changes that I've made. You can tell the difference from the first time I did it. My swing's changed so much and you can actually see it in the videogame."

Realistic though his virtual character may be, Tiger claims never to play as himself, citing that "it's just too weird". Eschewing the bespoke Woods, he prefers to use the game's character

customisation feature. As he explains: "I create my own character. I always play as either one of two guys. One guy's really big and fat and round, and I try and get him as big as I can. The other guy is all buffed out with a big old afro."

EASY TIGER

Although not particularly vocal on the golf course, Tiger has recorded some dialogue for the game. As he explains: "I was just saying things that I normally say to myself, I just had to say it louder. Which is different, because usually I just mumble it to myself and think nothing of it. But this is stuff that I actually had to get out, which was a little harder for

Rather casual driving style that.





Practice makes perfect.
Just ask Tiger.

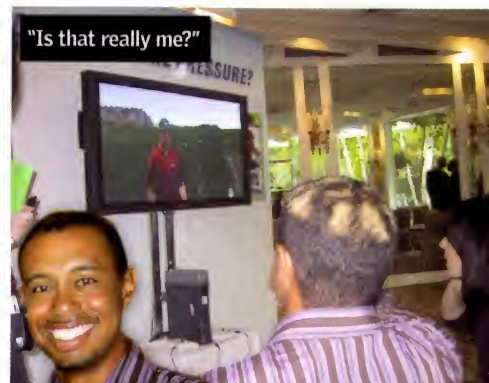
"I never play as myself - I play as a guy who's buffed out with a big afro"

Tiger Woods on his gaming alter ego

Count the chinos
in the room.



"Is that really me?"



"Absolutely, it's your
best side dahlink..."



As a professional sportsman, it's tempting to think that Tiger's competitive edge would spill over when playing the game. Is that the case? "Oh god, yes. You kidding me? The only difference is that we can't hit the reset button when we're out there playing."

He even confesses to being a regular joypad thrower, employing a specific technique. "You have to throw it into the couch," he explains. "It's cushioned, so it's OK." Essentially the equivalent of a golf course tantrum, he also admits: "I've been known to toss a couple of clubs here and there."

As indeed has your correspondent. So how can I improve my golf? "Practice. Honestly, the best way to improve is to do a lot of shadow swings in front of a mirror. Just make sure you keep rehearsing the same things over and over again so that when you go on the golf course it becomes a little bit easier." Alternatively, I could just stick to the game... **PCZ**

HOW REAL IS... TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06

There's a vague logic that suggests being good at golf would provide some advantage in the game. It's a theory that Tiger subscribes to. "On the courses I've played before, I know where to place it - and in the game, you try and put the ball in the same spot. Unfortunately, I'm better in real life than I am in the game - it's a bit easier in real life. The game's great, but it's not good when you get kids of eight and nine kicking your butt at it."

Conversely, learning the courses in the game would appear to be of benefit in reality. "Without a doubt," agrees Tiger. "My favourite course is St Andrews, which is in this layout, and when you see the shadows in late evening in the game, it's exactly the same in real life. That's what makes it so special in the videogame because it's my favourite course and the fact that it's just like it is remarkable."

PCZONE
4/5

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CLEOPATRA! COMIN' ATCHA! WITH A KNIFE!

Jon Blyth carries on with *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War*

www.midway.com ETA: June

HARVEST YOUR RESOURCES, create your base, build a few of those buildings that fart out soldiers, maybe train people a bit – it all amounts to a sizey heap of effort. So in your common or garden RTS, when you get around to launching an attack, it does seem unfair that you can't get in there and land a few roundhouse kicks yourself. Thinking about it, it seems positively wrong to let a bunch of minimal-AI automatons do the killing. It's doubtful they've even been given enough intelligence to actually enjoy their bloody rampage – it's simply a waste of good murder.

That's presumably why Stainless Steel Studios, RTS makers of repute

since 2001, made *Civilizations At War* (or at least started it off and let Midway finish it), since it lets you play as the heroic leader of your people. As the Egyptians, for example, after you've sent your slaves to mine some gold, you can nip into Cleopatra's head and run around. As Cleo, you can give simple squad commands to your troops, but she's so powerful, it's quite tempting to kill everything yourself on early levels. You'll also have missions that require you to leave your troops behind. Cleo can swim, her troops can't – so she'll have to nip across the river to snaff a boat from the Romans.

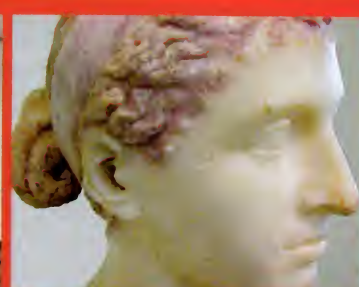


Does it work? Having only played through the unchallenging first missions provided by Messrs Midway, we're reserving judgment. If you truly love your RTS games, then a hands-on combat system might be as unwelcome as a flail-pawed howling Scrappy Doo.

Conversely, if you love killing things, there's not that satisfying sense of combat 'connect', and town and troop management is like being nagged about responsibility. In later missions, the two game aspects might gel, and with the right balance of gameplay, the gimmick could yet prove to be a stroke of genius. All will be revealed come the review...

HISTORY LESSONS

Is *Rise & Fall's* approach to a queen's problems more realistic than *Carry On Cleo*? You decide, with this dazzling and historically accurate ready-reckoner...



PROBLEM	RISE & FALL CLEO	CARRY ON CLEO	REAL CLEO
Require transportation for troops	Swim across river, steal boat from Romans	Wear a woolly shower cap and look gormless	Take a milky bath and marry a 12 year old
Attacked by Romans	Climb a tower, fire five flaming arrows at once	Say something about worshipping pussies, probably	Hide in a carpet and have sex with Caesar
Low on stamina	Smash a vase with a scythe	Recline while Sid James licks his chin	Commit suicide with an asp

BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS...

Will Porter rummages in the murky past of today's most powerful developers

THEY SAY THAT every story has a beginning. They say that from every acorn an oak tree has grown. They even say that every dog has his day – although that phrase may not be applicable in this instance. The multi-millionaire big-hitters that dominate the games market have secret pasts, you see – for every AAA title they pump onto your hard drive today, they had an EEE ten years ago. But once we've dug up these skeleton-filled closets and given them a good rattle via our good friend DOSbox – are they any cop? Gently shake your head in a rueful yet nostalgic manner, as we expose the games that time forgot...



JILL OF THE JUNGLE

YEAR: 1992 **DEVELOPER:** Epic Games

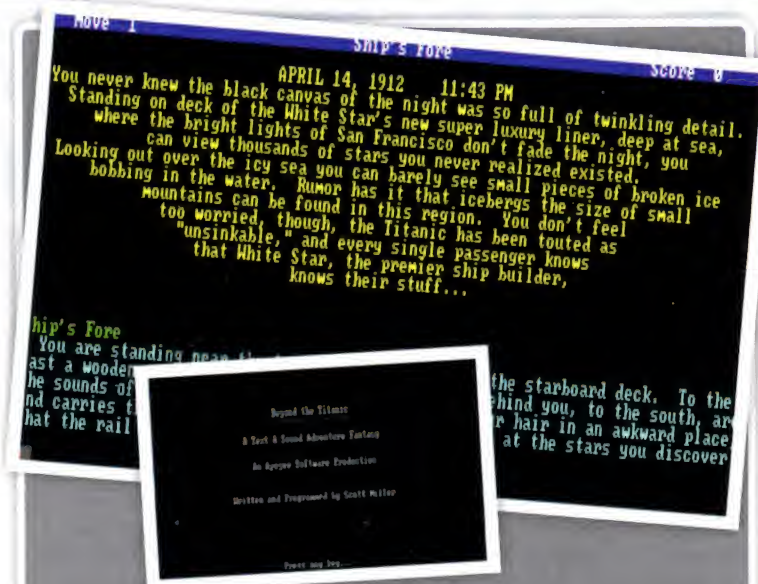
NOW: Creators of the most licensed 3D engine in recorded history, purveyors of *Unreal Tournament 2007* and the owners of a golf course that they've actually built out of tied-together 100-dollar bills.

THEN: Newly formed under the catchy moniker Potomac Computer Systems, Tim Sweeney's happy band of men settled in Maryland before becoming known as the far more jazzy Epic Megagames.

DESCRIPTION: Plucky Amazon lady Jill runs around various forests, huts and (obviously) jungles, with a homing knife that can be used to take out the snakes, crocodiles and flaming bird things that stand in her way. An apparently quite nubile and mammarially-gifted lady, from what I can make out from her heavily pixellated features, her green swimsuit leaves very little to the imagination. When climbing ropes her bottom becomes, in the words of *ZONE* staff writer Jon Blyth, "somewhat erotic".

STAND-OUT MOMENT WHEN REPLAYED: Jill can despatch beehives with her oddly static throwing knives – but if she dilly-dallies, then a terrifying swarm of pixel-bees chase her around the screen. This, though somewhat lo-fi, is terrifying in any day or age.

STILL ANY GOOD? Amazingly enough, *Jill Of The Jungle* remains far better than much of the bilge that idiots pay good money for on their mobile phones. It's no *Jazz Jackrabbit* (obviously), and the movement of our heroine isn't quite as lithe as we imagine the lady herself to be, but our nostalgia-o-meter remains remarkably high.



BEYOND THE TITANIC

YEAR: 1986 **DEVELOPER:** 3DRealms

NOW: Publishers and development co-ordinators on *Prey* and holders of the leash of both Messrs Max Payne and Duke Nukem.

THEN: A shareware start-out affair called Apogee that would later become diverted into the 3DRealms brand.

DESCRIPTION: 'Prepare to engage yourself in a most exciting adventure! But first, two simple questions: Are you using a COLOR screen (Y/N)? Yes! But I only have one disk drive I'm afraid – technology may have progressed, but my diskette acceptance procedure has diminished. This is one of those fabled text adventures of yore – a 'Go north', 'open box' and 'I do not know the word 'shit' game that sticks you on the famous sinking ship and will drown you without qualms if you spend too long rushing about the place.

STAND-OUT MOMENT WHEN REPLAYED: The bit at the start where the author (Apogee/3DRealms CEO Scott Miller) asks that you please contribute \$5 or \$10 to encourage said author to make new and better games and to 'compensent' (sic) him for his time. Bless!

STILL ANY GOOD? As someone who prefers to be spoon-fed games rather than resort to the grinding gears of my own imagination, I didn't expect to be bowled over by *Beyond The Titanic* – but it wasn't long until I was rattling through those old familiar key presses and desperately trying to figure out some way to lower my lifeboat and avoid textual death. Certainly better than crappy fantasy text adventures, if only because grue attacks are minimal.

I'm sure Wayne Gretzky Hockey was amazing, but at the time Milli Vanilli and Swingball were hot to trot too



WAYNE GRETZKY HOCKEY

YEAR: 1989 **DEVELOPER:** Bethesda

NOW: The creators of some of the finest adventure games ever created, notable self-publisher and purveyors of role-play excellence.

THEN: Recently founded and kept as a smaller subsidiary company to the larger Zenimax Media Company, Bethesda, surprisingly, went on to pretty much invent physics-based sports games.

DESCRIPTION: A top-down ice hockey game in which blobs wearing pink shirts take on blobs wearing mauve shirts, each holding brown sticks that flash to indicate which of the blobs you're controlling. There's also a mysteriously blue-faced referee.

STAND-OUT MOMENT WHEN REPLAYED: When you score a goal and all your little men skate off for a celebratory cuddle – to the accompaniment of fireworks on the big screen.



STILL ANY GOOD? Easily the game that least deserves a fanfared fanboy revisit, *Gretzky* suffers because, more than any other genre, sports games diminish in goodness as each year passes. At the time I'm sure this was amazing, but at the time Milli Vanilli and Swingball were thought quite hot to trot as well.



COMMANDER KEEN

YEAR: 1990 **DEVELOPER:** id Software

NOW: The granddaddies of first-person shootery and guardians of the *Dooms*, *Quakes* and *Enemy Territories* of this world.

THEN: Having met while making games for a company called Softdisk, this merry band of future gaming illuminati were talent-spotted by Apogee and set to work on what would become shareware history.

DESCRIPTION: The tale of a stranded spaceman running around a top-down map (that looks quite a lot like the traditional *Doom* Mars map come to think of it) and entering various structures to shoot aliens, pogo around, collect pizza and pick up books apparently written by noteworthy philosopher Immanuel Kant. The hero was a pre-adolescent boy genius called Billy Blaze who'd built a spaceship from a vacuum cleaner, stolen his brother's American Football helmet and become a galactic hero. A cherubic genius intent on blasting himself into space? Perhaps John Carmack's plans for orbit are something of a self-fulfilling prophecy...

STAND-OUT MOMENT WHEN REPLAYED: Realising the villains are the Vorticons, and wondering if they're in any way connected to Vortigaunts. I smell conspiracy.

STILL ANY GOOD? *Wolfenstein* would be id's ground-breaking FPS achievement, but having the first smooth-scrolling platform PC engine was quite a neat trick to pull at the time. Now, though, it's no *Jill Of The Jungle*. Nor even a *Jazz Jackrabbit*. And certainly not a *Zool*. Or, indeed, a *Zool 2*.



CLAW

YEAR: 1997 **DEVELOPER:** Monolith

NOW: Easily one of the world's leading FPS developers, Monolith are the masters of suspense, tension and ultra-violence. The rubbish *Blood 2* may have killed off a budding franchise, but *Condemned* and *FEAR* remain two of the best games of recent years.

THEN: A group of established Seattle-based peeps in educational and gaming software who flourished when Uncle Microsoft caught wind of their talents.

DESCRIPTION: *Claw* is the platformer that time forgot. Imagine a platform game based on *Dogtanian And The Three Muskehounds*, then make the dogs the bad guys, then mix in some animation swiped straight out of the Disney *Robin Hood* film, then make the lead

cat a pirate, then make the lead cat-pirate have a magic-claw fireball power – then you have *Claw*. Nathaniel Claw you see, said cat-pirate ("Meo-yarr!"), has been imprisoned by wicked Cocker Spaniards where he learns of the mystical Amulet of Nine Lives – which he then sets out for, unaware that the platform milieu in which he runs presents him with a fair number anyway.

STAND-OUT MOMENT WHEN REPLAYED: The wonderful way that the grey pirate tomtomcat you're controlling comments on what he's doing all the time – boldly stating, "Eat lead scallywag!" when piling lead into dog-guards' faces, or "I've had enough of this... exercise!" when being over-exerted.



STILL ANY GOOD?

Exactly why the world is unaware of *Claw's* existence is clear – it is, after all, a PC-exclusive platformer about a pirate cat – but it remains a special and unique game. The production values must have been high even back then, what with its neat, animated movies and orchestral score, while the parallax scrolling backgrounds cause many a sigh of nostalgia for simpler times. The campaign for the reintroduction of cartoon pirate cats into gaming starts now.



Turns out massive axes are mightier than the sword.



He really should pick on someone his own size.



"Where did you leave the Mini Eggs?"

GOTHIC 3

Jon Blyth gets back to basics with Deutschland's riposte to *Oblivion*...

DEVELOPER Piranha Bytes PUBLISHER JoWooD Productions WEBSITE www.gothic3.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

THE LOWDOWN

Same <i>Gothic</i> depth	✓
Same <i>Gothic</i> gameplay	✓
Not same interface	✓
Not drowning in pretty juice	✗
Not made by Bethesda	✗

THE CHANCE TO go to beautiful Vienna and grab a first look at *Gothic 3* was as exciting as defibrillation with a full English breakfast. Vienna: a city so steeped in the arts and so filled with opulent beauty that you can barely catch a bus without writing a lovely Waltz. *Gothic 3*: the latest game in an unfeasibly popular (on the continent at least) series of free-form roleplayers. Being released in the wake of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, however, can *Gothic* hold even a +1 candle of flickering to Bethesda's might?

Publisher JoWooD think so, and in their exuberance, they laced our Viennese surroundings with an array of medieval gubbins and period what-nots. There was swordplay from a pair of hulking beasts and a man who couldn't seem to stop playing the hurdy-gurdy, all while we tried to eat lunch without screaming at him. It genuinely felt like being in the third floor of a 18th century Viennese building in medieval times, only with more free lasagne.

Perhaps I should tell you about *Gothic 3*. It's an epic, third-person RPG from German developers Piranha Bytes. You could be forgiven for having missed the first two

games, despite a reserved but hot clap in the UK. People went dappy for the depth of gameplay and attention to detail, but were forced to acknowledge the alienating interface and slow pace of the early game. On the other hand, even those who hated it acknowledged that there was a damn good game hiding in (and especially behind) the first dozen hours. Everyone also agreed that the whole affair was very, very German.

ORC HANDLES

The plots of *Gothic* and *Gothic II* didn't stray too far from the traditional goblinland plot directory. What impressed wasn't the storyline, so much as the depth and openness of gameplay. You could have many side missions on the go, and there was rarely a quest with only one method of completion.

To take a basic example, when you were asked to prove you'd killed an orc, you could go for the grinding, level-up tactic and waste good hours getting strong enough to take on the beast; or you could nick a weapon from an orc statue and lie. It saved the messy process of confronting an orc in the pub, when there's orc ladies around and that.

Like the prophecy in *Oblivion*, the main plot of *Gothic 3* is the big thing in the background that you can put your head down and aim towards, or ignore for as long as you like. You play the same character as before, but you've escaped the island of the first two games to a mainland dominated by orcs. Beyond the manifold missions dealing with that, there's hundreds of side quests if you love to explore, and Piranha have tried to make sure they're not simply the letter-ferrying quests of yore.

BETWEEN EU AND ME

The *Gothic* series is absolutely huge in Europe, especially Germany. Despite that, Piranha Bytes are proud of their small team – they've grown to only 19 members. They live and breathe the worlds they create (the core members have worked on the *Gothic* series for nine years), and are hailed as erratic, obsessive heroes who hand-place every bush in every forest, and are loved by a public whose gaming tastes are, perhaps, simply more patient than our own.

Gothic 3 producer Michael Paack says that the small team allows them all to feel a sense of craftsmanship: "With teams of 200 or more, with someone making the

ETA
Sept
'06

THE STORY SO FAR...

PIRANHA BYTES



BYTES

Five men leave their jobs to join up with three freelancers and start work on *Gothic*.



GOTHIC

The finished article is deemed lovely but awkward, like a pregnant lady doing sit-ups.



GOTHIC II

The second outing is received with more warmth than the first, but with similar niggles.



GOTHIC 3

Question is, will they manage to iron out the crinkly bits and whip up a smoothie?

1997

2001

2005

2006



objects, and someone somewhere else making the textures, there isn't a sense that any one person has created something.

The different demands of the European public are illustrated perfectly in the Q&A after the presentation. No "how does this game extend the themes of *Gothic II*?" or "how does this fit into a rapidly expanding RPG market?" here. Instead, a man with a semi-matted ponytail asks: "Can you set fire to things and people?" His methodical delivery makes it clear he wants to set fire to things *and* people, one after the other. "Yes, there are fire spells," answers the developer. "No! I mean with a torch!" comes a brittle reply. With this hunger for realism, he presumably wants to be able to piss the fire out too, so long as he's consumed enough liquids in-game.

THE DIVINE NEIN

With *Gothic 3*, however, the developers are making great efforts to fix the aspects of the game that dogged sales in the UK and US, without disgruntling the existing fans. These frustrations included the length of time spent before you got to any real action or character development. Spending a dozen hours to get anywhere interesting



Forests. Nature's way of saying trees are great.

Dinomite & Magic

Can *Gothic 3* live up to the dino hype?

"Wake up Ted. Joke's over."



Fable: 'that game where you can punch children and get married'. *The Sims*: 'that game where you can trap children in the swimming pool and get married'. *Gothic 3*: from press releases so far, it seems to be setting itself up as 'that game with orcs and dinosaurs'. And who doesn't love dinosaurs? Dinosaurs have managed, through excellent PR and the useless-armed charms of the Tyrannosaurus Rex, to move into the world of the timelessly cool. It's an amazing world, full of shouty pirates, old-fashioned robots and ironically-reincarnated ghosts, and Godzilla is the mayor. But it's a dangerous game: cool guests can often embarrass their hosts. Capcom's *Dino Crisis* was bum-clad rubbish, and *Dino Island* damaged the Prehistoric Tycoon genre beyond repair. It was like inviting the Fonz to a basket-weaving party. Baryonyx lovers everywhere will be bellowing – can *Gothic 3* live up to the dinosaur brand?

Your reputation and magic have gone, but this is all explained in plot terms far more sophisticated than 'you got hit on the head and your skills fell off'

was off-putting to anyone with a job or without an alcohol problem. 'Those slow, frustrating hours of difficult strength-building and frequent death are a small price to pay for the sense of immersion,' say the fans. 'I just got murdered by a sheep, for Christ's sake,' reply the impatient.

That's not even mentioning the fact that you were forced to squirm through the first ten minutes of, erm, unpoetically translated dialogue. In *Gothic 3* the long exposition has gone, more effort has been put into the localisation, and thankfully, you don't start the game as an unjustifiably feeble demon-killer. Your reputation and magic have gone, but this is all explained in plot terms far more sophisticated than 'you got hit on the head and your skills fell off'. Be assured, though, that you won't spend your first hours kicking ant hills and running away.

ISN'T IT CUTE?

Even if you loved *Gothic II*, meanwhile, you had to concede that the interface was special – special in a way that only a forgiving mother with a strong stomach

could love. On top of that, the combat system was ill-at-ease on a PC. The game was originally developed for the PS2, and barely changed when the development moved over to PC. Piranha Bytes hold their hands up to this, and promise that their latest oeuvre's interface will be quicker to use and more intuitive, with more traditional short-cuts.

"The combat is mouse and timing-based, so you learn the actions of your enemies," continues Paack, explaining that the statistic calculations are complemented (or sabotaged) by the your own nimble hands.

Yet another issue with the earlier games was the trial-and-error frustration of hunting. Easy kills would share a paddock with monsters who could tear your arms off, and there often weren't many clues to what you could handle. You'd be regularly and randomly killed for a large part of your earlier levels. Now, creatures of similar power will lurk in similar areas, allowing you to plan excursions away from the paths.

In a sense, Piranha Bytes are fortunate; the complaints that might have stopped

the other games taking off over here have nothing to do with the core gameplay that made them so popular in Europe, so they can address them without angering the men with semi-matted ponytails, fire or no fire.

NO, REALLY

Orcs and magic aside, *Gothic 3* is going for that grand sense of realism – like the clouds that blend and coagulate before rain has been called in, while needless levels of research have gone into the buildings and village structures.

Realism, though. It's a tricky lady. While *Oblivion* allows you to find quests by overhearing conversations – a trick as simple as it is genius, tricking you into suspending your disbelief and giving you a crafty tingle – *Gothic 3* is going for a similar pervasive level of 'touches' that encourage you to give up the cynic.

For example, there's a physics engine, but it's ambient. They don't want you walking around town firing barrels into the air, because that would require an aghast reaction à la *Black & White* from all





"I won't axe you again!"
(He will really.)



"You can't get the staff!"
(He already has.)



Ready for a reet good night
out in Nottingham.

AN ORC'S DIARY

Having taken over the world of Myrtana, orcs can now take it easy. Here's one beast's private thoughts...



"Dear Diary. May have put back out with all that conquering. Definitely getting one of those comfy chairs."



"Dear Diary. We keep the humans slaves now. But aren't we all slaves... To our hearts?"



"Dear Diary. This is Bkrтч. He doesn't like my poetry, and burps without apologising. I wish I was an elf."



"Dear Diary. This is my favourite meadow. I wish I were a flower, then perhaps girls would pick me :("

witnesses to make it seem realistic. Instead, when we attacked a blacksmith at work, he let go of the sword he was sharpening and it dropped to the floor in a completely believable way. It was a tiny, tiny touch, but it was understated enough to get under your skin. True to say, however, that when we sorted out our differences, the blacksmith picked his sword up and resumed work two metres away from the sharpening wheel. "That will be fixed for the final version," Paack confirms.

AND REST

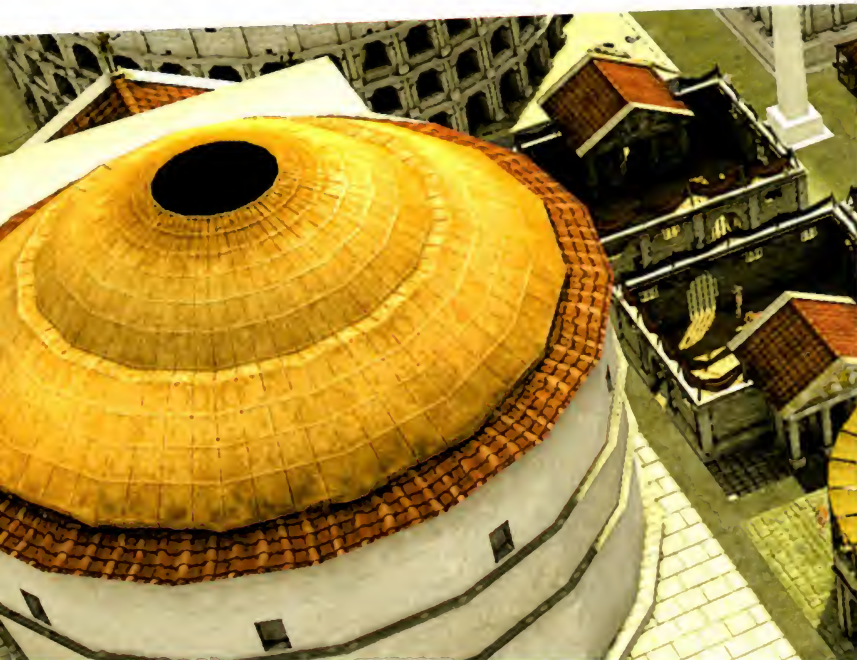
Games reviewers, having been forced to play through to the great bits, have given the *Gothic* series higher scores than the sales figures reflect; in this very tome right here, the first two games received 74% and

80%. Them's unshabby scores, considering the acknowledged faults.

Considering *Gothic 3*, as far as we can see, has a bigger world, a deeper plot, dinosaurs and that cool thing with the weather that people seem to be doing at the moment (*Just Cause* is at it, too), there's no reason it shouldn't do even better. And far more importantly than that, with the more accessible interface and combat methods, the wonderful British public might even decide to buy it, too.

The other games were unarguably good; hopefully Piranha Bytes are edging towards greatness – albeit greatness not quite complemented by a dated graphics engine. That is, unless *Oblivion* hasn't raised the bar to 'unreasonably brilliant' and killed RPGs forever. **PCZ**





THE TALENTED MR MEIER

Will Porter meets a gaming legend as he's inducted into San Francisco's fabled Walk of Game. (That's Sid being inducted, not Will...)



THE METREON COMPLEX in San Francisco is an odd place: its main features seem to be a lonely Mexican man standing behind a popcorn counter forlornly waving an empty paper coke cup. It's not unlike the atmosphere you'd get if you stood in Lakeside Shopping Centre at 2am on a Sunday after an unexpected nuclear apocalypse, coupled with lots of escalators and a Games Workshop. It was created as an \$85m

entertainment centre that shackled the mainstream to the nerdstream – but was designed by men who wore their caps backwards and said "dude", "yo" and "market awareness" far too much.

The only thing that the Metreon really has going for it is the Walk of Game – the game industry's answer to the sidewalk outside the Mann Chinese Theatre, or the bits of Leicester Square that Michael Caine has forever marked with his handprints. Here, the great and good are lauded for development and design achievements – in 2005, among others, Shigeru Miyamoto, Nolan Bushnell and Sonic the Hedgehog got the plaudits. This year saw shiny metal stars awarded to *StarCraft*, *Final Fantasy*, John Carmack, Lara Croft, *EverQuest* and... The main man himself, Sid Meier – erstwhile genius and creator of *Civilization*, *Railroad Tycoon*, *Alpha Centauri* and *Pirates!*

My main worry upon meeting Sid Meier was that, being slightly tipsy and in possession of a body fully convinced that it was 6.30 in the morning, I would compulsively hug him. Not only because he's an eminently huggable chap, but also because his games earned me a valuable History GCSE. In the end, Meier's personal space remained respected – a sudden bearhug would have been impolite after our initial conversation that mainly covered air travel and tourist hotspots of Great Britain rather than what a supremely wonderful human being he is. As he ushered me aside and mapped out his three new projects, however, I definitely think that we shared a 'moment'. As a sidenote, his favourite new game is rocking out to *Guitar Hero* on the PlayStation 2 by the way; a cheery mental image that I will, in all likelihood, take to the grave.

Meier's favourite new game is rocking out to *Guitar Hero* on PS2; a cheery mental image I'll take to the grave

Best Supported Actresses

See! Girls do like games after all!

"I've got pretty teeth!
Look at my pretty teeth!"



Also present at an awards ceremony designed to celebrate the input of some of the most creative minds in the business – among them the godfather of strategy and the creator of the FPS – were three Colgate-smile-attired laydeez. The *EverQuest 2* Antonia Bayle model and friend (who I've mocked many times before in these pages) and the new Lara Croft girl (who I shall endeavour to mock regularly from now on) were all present to add a much needed level of gravitas to proceedings, by bleating staccato into a microphone while not leaving very much to the imagination, breast-wise. Hooray for muffled eroticism during game award ceremonies!

WEARING PINK PYJAMAS WHEN HE COMES... SID MEIER'S RAILROADS!

TOWARDS THE END of last year, somewhere deep inside Firaxis HQ, Sid Meier shut himself away with a computer to create a prototype for his new game. After what one of his development team confided to me as being a "depressingly short amount of time," he reappeared, all smiles, with an intricate working model of what would become *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, a sequel to his own seminal *Railroad Tycoon* in all but name – and the team started to build from there.

Railroads! is recreating *Railroad Tycoon* in the same way that the similarly exclamation-marked *Pirates!* found new glory two years ago – taking the fun of the old and shovelling it into the boiler of modern technology. It's now introducing such concepts as 3D graphics, surround sound, real-time multiplayer and bloody big mountains with bloody big tunnels going through them.

You play as an entrepreneur in the golden age of trains – a timeframe that spans the century or so from 1830-1950. Money isn't simply made through jobsworth ticket inspectors arbitrarily demanding post-privatisation on-the-spot fines, either – it's your job to shuttle around letters, wood, coal, steel, people and the like to wherever they're needed, in direct competition with AI (or human) players

who'll be attempting to undercut your track-building expertise and cut you off at the economic pass.

CHUFF CHUFF

"What we thought was fun and special about *Railroad Tycoon* was just the fun of railroading – of running your own railroad, building the track, building the stations, figuring out where the trains should go, what sort of cars you should use. That sandbox feeling where everything's at your fingertips," Meier tells me. He then explains the naturally progressing stages of the game: from track creation, to optimising your cashflow and where it's directed (do you want to be a paper magnate or an oil baron?), to finally fully ploughing yourself into the stock market. Then, you can absorb small fry railroad companies, buy out major competitors and protect your own company from unwelcome takeovers.

The real joy of the new game however, and primary thrust of what I was shown, is the ability to build your own working model railway which, despite the stereotypical domain of those with slight social issues, is quite a fun endeavour (if well hidden from public view). Tracks bend, terrains deform, bridges are built upon bridges and pretty little lumber mills deposit logs atop the willing backs of steam locomotive cars in



Every schoolboy's dream. Apart from the ones who liked Hoovering more.

Trains: formerly
cylinders on wheels.



scenes that kickstart long-forgotten emotions in anyone who was once a proud owner of a Thomas The Tank Engine lunch-box. (I later got a Transformers one, so don't send letters.)

TOOT TOOT

This isn't a detailed rail simulator, it's a stylised sandbox tycoon game – the actual 'Tycoon' being removed from the title due to the poisoning of the genre since the original terminated at platform five. "I'm flattered in a way that people can call it a 'Tycoon' game, and that people will buy it, unfortunately not every 'Tycoon' game has been of the highest quality and I think it's got a reputation," explains Sid as delicately as he can. "So we thought maybe it was time to start anew – a new genre."

And then, despite the poisoned 'Tycoon' legacy and despite having been to Birmingham New Street station, your correspondent was suddenly overcome by Sid's love of rail. It might be slightly tragic, but I think there's an officious ticket inspector inside all of us...

No fat controller, sadly.



ALL TECHNOLOGY TREES LEAD TO... CIVCITY: ROME

IT'S NOT ALL recreations of former glories, as appreciated as they may be. You see, the venerable *Civilization* series is getting a younger sibling. "Everyone has wondered when they're playing *Civilization* what exactly is going on in a certain city," states the illustrious Mr Meier as our conversation moves on to his exciting collaboration with Brit outfit Firefly – many of whom were of *Caesar* series stock before moving onto *Stronghold*. "But in *Civ*, we can't just stop the game and let you become really involved with it – after all, you've got an entire empire to manage!"

Let's hear a big Salve! then for *CivCity*, as before we all 'omnes exeunt', you'll be as excited about it as a starry-eyed vestal virgin on a nightboat to Sparta (or something – is my public school education showing?). "At the end of the day it's about the atomic level elements of *Civilization*," explains Simon Bradbury of Firefly when I call him for a quick chat a week later.

"*CivCity* takes that atomic element and puts it under the microscope. It's like taking one of those Google maps where you zoom in and explore it in more detail – and it uses

a lot of the *Civilization* ideas, like city happiness, culture and religions."

ECCE ROMANI

To start off with, you only have a scrubby settlement – a few huts scrabbling around the Tiber with roaming lions who are no doubt relatively miffed at your dreams of expansion. As the game goes on, these houses grow in stature from the humble hut to the mighty palace – and as the house gets posher and the game progresses, its occupant will move up the social ranks: getting a wife, having kids, buying slaves to take on family tasks – all the way up to some of them becoming a Patrician.

Essentially, *CivCity* takes the sliding bars that govern the cities of *Civilization* and looks at them on the macro level – whole resource chains of production, mining, food and polytheistic religion will have to be dealt with, as well as, of course, research.

"*Civilization* has this somewhat horizontal bar of research from left to right – but doesn't have quite as much depth to it in each particular age," explains Bradbury. "Now, because we're focusing on one particular age, it becomes much more of a

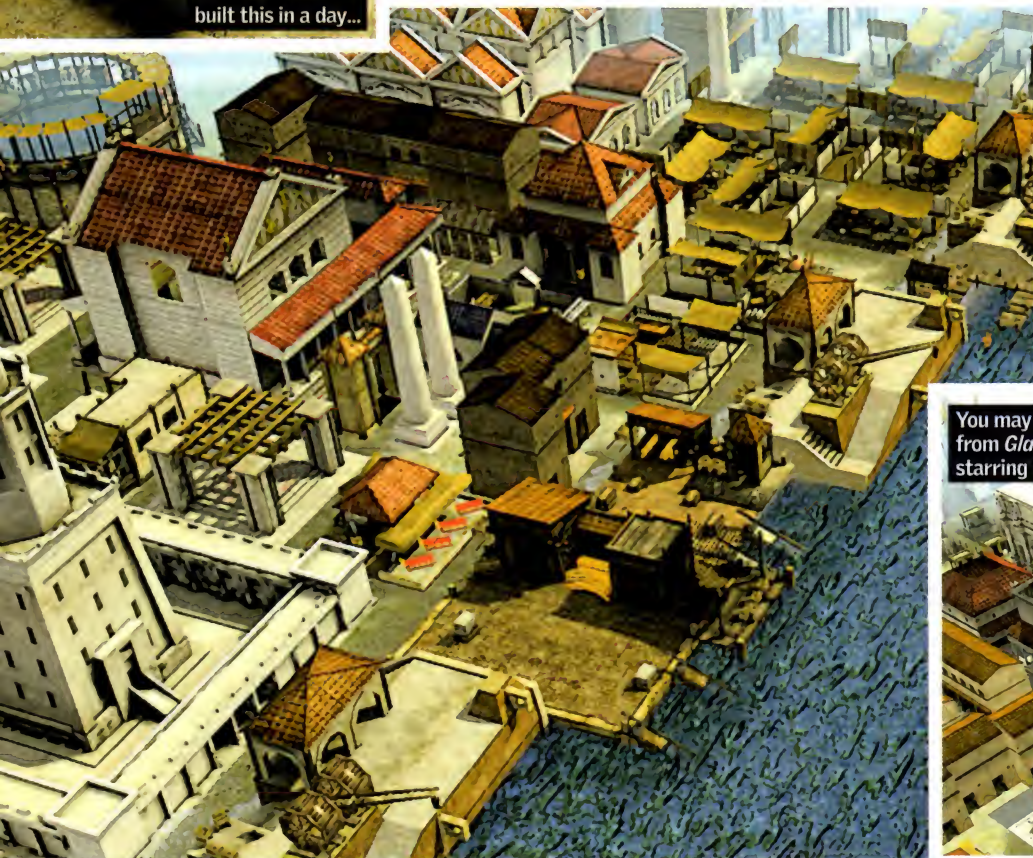
vertical bar, and we've got about 75 things you can research." This wider, more in-depth technology tree will help you streamline your city – perhaps say, speeding up the rate of blessing in a temple – and have an obvious effect on your cityscape. Not to forget, of course, the carried-over concept of City Wonders – which will obviously cover ground like the Circus Maximus and Coliseum.

CAVE CANEM

But what about the sex? What about rulers kissing their sisters and marrying horses? "If we were being run by Rockstar, it would probably be all that, wouldn't it?" laughs Bradbury. "I was touring America and pretty much half the people asked me, 'Is there going to be a vomitorium?' and I had to disappoint them." We shouldn't expect the privates on parade of the *Rome* TV series then? "No! We delve into the way they lived their lives, but we've left out all the grand sweep of the military side that *Rome: Total War* deals with. We're more about the humdrum – how they lived and the fact that they had a toilet in their kitchens..." And they call that a civilisation?



You could have built this in a day...



They used to eat squirrels, you know...



You may recognise this from *Gladiator Eroticus* starring Misty Mundae.



Robin Hood is in the trees to the north.



Building barracks for the clash between Octavian and Mark Anthony no doubt...

YOU CALL THIS A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION? CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS

BUT WHY DO we need an expansion pack? "With *Warlords* we can add some new ideas, some new units some new leaders – really keep the play experience going," explains kindly gaming patriarch Meier. "It's been six months since the original game came out, and it's really just a way of helping people who liked the game to play a little more and expand on some things that we couldn't put into the full game."

Now to me, *Civilization IV* is an eminently unexpandable game. I mean, it covers the entirety of human history – what could they have left out? "But there are few subjects as broad in scope as 'civilisation'," succinctly counter-argues Firaxis's Jesse Smith. "So it's not difficult to come up with ideas for an expansion. The biggest challenge we face when expanding the game is maintaining a strong gameplay balance. Each element of the game is intricately connected to the others, so if you change or adjust one feature even slightly, it can affect other parts of the game." Well yes, I suppose the man does have a point. But what's new?

LORDS OF WAR

Well, for a start there's the eponymous Warlord unit. Generally seen as a 'bad thing' by modern society, committers of large-scale carnage being largely frowned upon unless they smile and assure us that it seemed a good idea at the time, Firaxis are sure that their Warlords are directing a laser-targeted missile of love direct to each of our individual hearts.

"The Warlord is available from the very beginning of the game, and works similarly to the other Great People," explains Smith. "As your units engage in combat, you build up your Warlord Great People points. Once you've engaged in enough combat, you're awarded a Warlord unit. Warlords make battle even more fun, not just because they're powerful, but also because they give players the opportunity to advance some of their units deeper into the promotion tree."

With the added bonus of being able to use Warlords as you would any other great person – creating military academies, discovering free technology and the like – there's no doubt they'll be a useful tool. Although quite whether they'll be named after famous real-world warlords hasn't yet been revealed. Pol Pot, anyone?

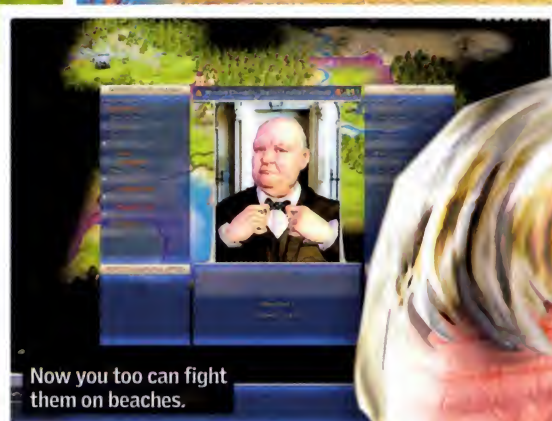
MIGHTY EMPIRE

Alongside these bringers of mayhem will stand six new civilisations (each with the expected unique unit), ten new leaders and three new wonders – although sadly no new religions, so those dour-looking people nailing a request for the advent of Protestantism to the oaken door of Firaxis's Baltimore digs will remain forsaken.

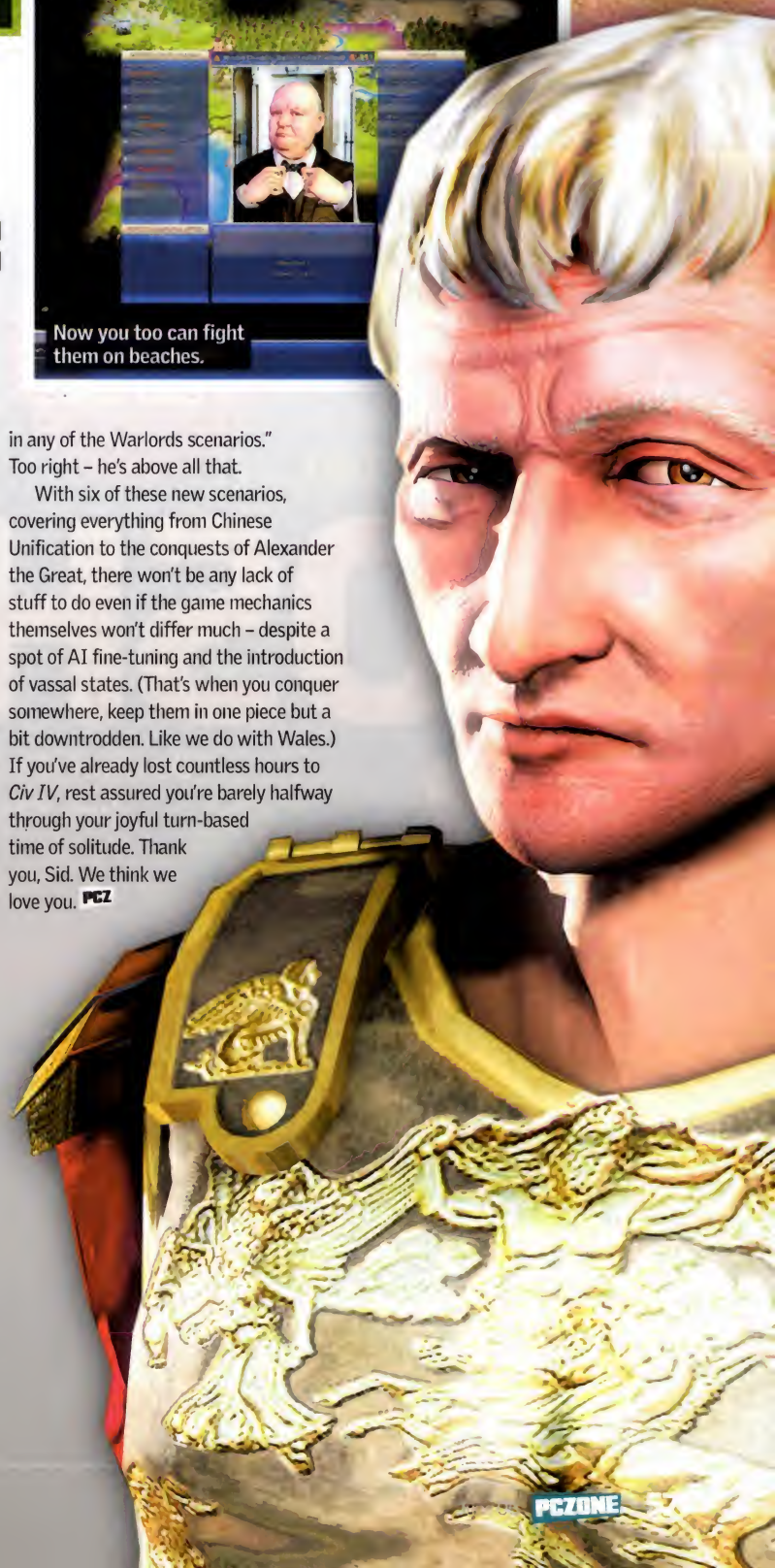
Patriots will, however, be delighted to hear of our own Winston Churchill's accession to the *Civilization* hall of fame. "Churchill was the most requested leader in a poll we held on our website," states Smith. "He'll be the third English leader and we're extremely happy with how he's turned out. However, he won't be featured

in any of the Warlords scenarios." Too right – he's above all that.

With six of these new scenarios, covering everything from Chinese Unification to the conquests of Alexander the Great, there won't be any lack of stuff to do even if the game mechanics themselves won't differ much – despite a spot of AI fine-tuning and the introduction of vassal states. (That's when you conquer somewhere, keep them in one piece but a bit downtrodden. Like we do with Wales.) If you've already lost countless hours to *Civ IV*, rest assured you're barely halfway through your joyful turn-based time of solitude. Thank you, Sid. We think we love you. **PCZ**



Now you too can fight them on beaches.





Abandoned carnivals: it doesn't get much scarier than this.

DEVELOPER Irrational Games
PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE www.irrationalgames.com
PREVIOUSLY IN... 167

**COVER
FEATURE**

FORGET CITADEL...

BIOSHOCK

THE LOWDOWN

Actual moral choices to be made	✓
Fantastic setting	✓
Beautiful sounds and visuals	✓
Successor to <i>System Shock 2</i>	✓
Genuinely scary	✓
Not enough room for more positives	✗

"Darling it's better, down where it's wetter," lies *Steve Hogarty*. While under the sea

ETA
2007



Don't come crying to us
when you stub your toe.



Hay fever doesn't
stand a chance now.

KEN LEVINE, AMONG many other achievements the creator of *System Shock 2*, is in front of me leaping around and stabbing imaginary corpses with imaginary syringes. I meanwhile, nod and take notes. He is, of course, demonstrating the finer points of *Bioshock's* AI system – aping the gesticulations of his terrifying stem cell harvesting pre-teens with worrying aplomb.

However, coming from the man who's worked on outstanding games like *Thief*, *Freedom Force*, *Tribes: Vengeance*, *SWAT 4* and of course, *System Shock 2*, this eccentric behaviour is acceptable. And with the *System Shock 2* licence dissected into a squillion pieces and scattered across the globe like glittery fragments of the dreams of sci-fi nerds everywhere, we're quite prepared to engrave Ken Levine's name into our foreheads – or at least write it in pen all down one arm – for deciding to create *Bioshock*, the spiritual successor to the classic first-person RPG.

In the darkened conference room in Boston, in front of a massive HDTV displaying *Bioshock's* pause menu, Ken

Levine, Irrational Games' lead designer, composes himself and takes a seat. "The focus is to create a world that we draw the player into as deeply as possible," he begins, "even deeper than in *System Shock 2*. What we're trying to do primarily is put the choice and the power in the player's hands and give him, in the classic Spiderman sense, that great power and that great responsibility.

"The main burden of that in a game like *Bioshock* is building a world that's believable for the gamer, that feels like a real place, and that doesn't feel like a ride at Disneyworld with pop-up ghosts. We want Rapture to feel like a place that they can explore and have react to them in a believable fashion."

DAMP PATCH

Already Rapture, the city in which *Bioshock* is set, is beginning to sound enticing, and squinting at the menu screen reveals the vague outline of neon signs and tiled floors in the background. I shift about in my seat a bit and start to worry that I may need a pee.

Levine continues: "The world we're talking about is an underwater failed utopia. When you start the game, you wake up in the middle of the ocean underwater. We

haven't told the player anything, the same way as when you woke up this morning there was no extensive cut-scene which told you who you are or what you're doing.

"You swim to the surface, you see debris sinking past you and realise you've been in some kind of plane crash. When you come to the surface of the ocean, and this is all interactive, the very surface of the water is on fire and there are suitcases and luggage scattered all over. You see this strange structure, almost like a lighthouse sitting in the middle of the ocean. You swim to it, and inside this lighthouse is a sort of art-deco bathysphere, a big globe device that's designed to bring people under the ocean, like a mini-submarine. So you get in this device and it brings you down to the bottom of the ocean, and as you're descending through the water you see the city of Rapture."

CHECK UNDER THE SEA

The more Levine speaks, the more questions he creates. Rapture is, as he said, an underwater failed utopia, built by an ex-soviet named Andrew Ryan in 1946 for the world's cultural elite, the best and the brightest of

"The focus is to create a world that draws you in as deep as possible – even deeper than *System Shock 2*"

Ken Levine, Irrational Games





Freedom Force Sequel? Over-presumptuous hype-stirring journalists?

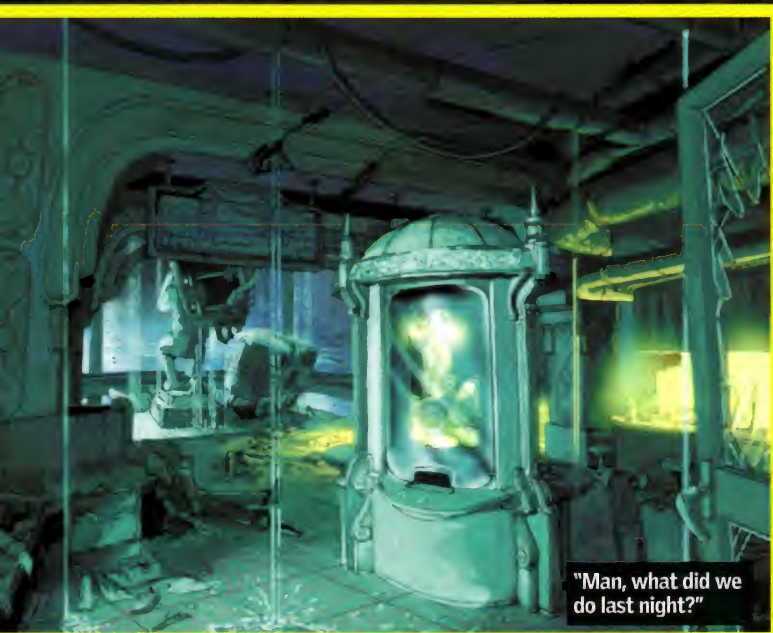


"For Freedom!"

Our sources on the inside (or perhaps just a loose-lipped developer), have hinted (or perhaps confirmed) the existence of another project sitting under Irrational's hat. No details were dropped, other than that it'll be based on an old title which had a 'crappy interface', and one which they're completely reworking from scratch. Further investigation was halted by a pair of PR people who looked like they may have been about to cry. Allow us to speculate then, for a moment, that perhaps, just perhaps, we could be looking at a new *Freedom Force* game? Probably a long shot, but if it turns out to be true, I'll be round to all your houses to claim my five pounds.

"They're going to build a utopian city using wood and marble. And under the ocean? Well f* the ocean, that's their attitude"**

Ken Levine, Irrational Games



"Man, what did we do last night?"

humanity – artists, painters, scientists, athletes. "Ryan wants to create a society where the best people can do their best work unconstrained by government, unconstrained by religions, unconstrained by, as he puts it, bullshit notions of altruism," continues Levine.

"Unlike what you might see in a movie like *The Abyss*, they're not going to build a little space station underwater, f*** that. They're going to build a utopian, unbelievably gorgeous city utilising the finest architectural techniques of the time, and it's not going to be steel and steam, it's going to be wood and marble. And under the ocean? Well f*** the ocean, that's their attitude."

Of course, a bunch of smart blokes in a bubble does not a good game make, so in typical fashion everything falls to pieces when a stem cell-generating sea slug dubbed 'Adam' is discovered by a man named Fontaine. With the ability to modify bodies to become thinner, better looking, smarter or faster, Adam quickly becomes the currency of Rapture. Fontaine upsets the delicate balance of power in the capitalist

society – the player arrives in the early '60s, to find the place ruined.

"This conflict develops between these two very powerful men and eventually it tears Rapture apart," explains Levine, "but not before people start using Adam to change their biology as the conflict becomes more physical and violent. People start enhancing themselves to engage in this conflict. You come down after this war has happened. Much like *System Shock 2*, part of the experience of *Bioshock* is learning about what happened in Rapture, putting the pieces together."

GUN FUN

Finally, Levine turns to the mammoth screen and begins to show us exactly what the bizarre storyline has culminated in. As the pause menu disappears, a first-person view of a small, dark street fades into view. First impressions are great, and even though it's very early code on display, *Bioshock* is looking fantastic, a heavily modified Unreal Engine 3 rendering the art deco surroundings in beautiful detail.



"Well, we run the electricity off the gas, and the gas off the electricity..."

THE STORY SO FAR...

IRRATIONAL GAMES



System Shock 2

Fantastic first-person RPG which not enough people bought. You sillies.



1999

Freedom Force

Fantastic comic-book-style strategy RPG which not enough people bought. You numpties.



2002

Tribes: Vengeance

Fantastic first-person shooter which not enough people bought. You goons.



2004

SWAT 4

Fantastic tactical FPS which not enough people bought. What are you like?

2005

The seats are probably damp.



"The weapons are cobbled together with household items," explains Levine, pointing at the odd-looking pistol on-screen. "The ammo feed is made from a tomato tin and there's a model airplane engine to power the automatic chamber. Weapons are modifiable too – the weapons system alone is more complex and deeper than in any other FPS."

It makes sense too – you wouldn't find conventional weaponry in an isolated utopian society. As Levine presses onwards he comes across a rotating machine-gun turret made using a gun and an office chair. Little touches like this attempt to flesh out the world Irrational are so keen to convey in *Bioshock*, and it seems to work.

MR & MRS ANGRY

Apart from mechanical furniture, what kind of enemies can we expect to encounter in Rapture? "One of the most traditional enemies in Rapture are the Aggressors," explains Levine. "These are people in the world who've mutated, they've taken on mutations just to survive and had to change their bodies a lot. The





That's a woman you can trust.



Carrying her over the threshold, Diver Dan realised the marriage would never work.

interesting thing about them is they're not necessarily thrilled to be these hideous creatures – they're aware of what they are. You see these guys, men and women in period clothing, who've taken these drugs to change their bodies but their faces have changed horribly."

THE OPPOSITION

Various pieces of artwork are placed on the conference room table. A woman in a green dress with a mane of red hair, wearing a mask and wielding two hooks, for instance. "The real violence in Rapture started in 1959, on New Year's Eve," states Levine. "Some people use a party mask to cover their faces because they're aware of what they look like now." Creepy, but it gets creepier.

"Any of these guys can use any of the weapons in the game. This woman, she's now equipped to be what we call a 'ceiling crawler'. That's a class of creature that can jump up to the ceiling and climb all over it to attack the player." *Bioshock's* answer to the Midwives from *System Shock 2*? We can only hope.

Later in the day, I spot a whiteboard in Levine's office with various phrases hastily jotted down. Things like, 'What have I done?! What have I done?!' and 'I don't remember my name'. None of which might be part-shittingly terrifying when scrawled on a whiteboard in chunky blue marker, but if you've played *System Shock 2*, you know how a few sound samples can turn a regular enemy into something far more

fundamentally disturbing. *Bioshock* will carry this same sort of atmosphere, with traumatised and deluded civilians screaming about everyday things such as their eternal, everlasting pain.

Where the game really gets interesting however is with the inclusion of great, hulking beasts called Protectors, and more importantly the very thing they protect – small (and inherently scary) children called Gatherers. "We wanted to have intelligences in the world who weren't necessarily your enemies but maybe gave you some interesting moral choices," muses Levine. "We thought it would be cool to have creatures going about and doing their business. Not like civilians in *GTA* where you can pretty much ignore them, but creatures which had something you really needed. We came up with the notion of the Protector and the Gatherer."

TO PROTECT AND SERVE

"In Rapture, the only way to get Adam is to recycle it from dead bodies," continues Levine. "What's more, the only ones who can do this are the Gatherers. You'll see the big Protector and the little girl walking around, and they don't bother you if you don't bother them. The little girl carries this long syringe device, and there are bodies scattered throughout the world.

"We don't script this either. She'll wander around and find a dead body, before calling to her Protector to follow her. Then she'll kneel down, put this syringe in the body and

extract the Adam. The only way she can process and recycle this Adam is through her own body, so she drinks the stuff, and you can watch all this happening. As you play, you learn about how these kids came about and how they were exploited."

Clearly, Rapture isn't a nice place, but it does pose some interesting moral decisions, as Levine confirms. "You now have a choice to make in the world. There are people who encourage you and reward you for getting through the game without ever harmfully interacting with the Gatherers – as I said, if you don't bother them they don't bother you. And let me tell you, the Protectors they're with? They're tough cookies. They're some of the toughest monsters in the game. But the reward for taking the Adam from the Gatherers is quite high – it means a lot of resources for you. So we're going to give you a real moral choice to make – is this something you're willing to participate in?"

BLAM!

Indeed, the idea of blasting a hole in a child's face, even a virtual child's face, to retrieve their stem cells and upgrade your body is slightly unnerving. I shift in my seat again, but for different reasons this time. There aren't many games which place these kinds of decisions in the hands of the person at the keyboard, even fewer which make those decisions so central to the gameplay.

It's not just a matter of whether or not to kill a child though – there are a few alternative ways of acquiring the precious



The menacing silhouette strikes again...

Pass The Plasmid

No further skills required



No need for a reading light for this fella.

Bioshock's skill system will work in a similar way to *System Shock 2's*, with abilities called plasmids capable of being purchased with Adam and installed at various plasmid stations dotted around Rapture. "We took a page out of *Guild Wars*' book," explains Irrational's Ken Levine, "in that you choose a plasmid loadout for yourself at the plasmid stations. You're stuck with that loadout for a period of time until you find another plasmid station." Once installed, these plasmids grant you abilities and strengths, such as extra agility, extra jumping power or more interesting powers like Aggressor Irritant, a power which turns any enemy into something that 'deserves a right good kicking' in the eyes of any Aggressors. Powers like these allow you to play the AI off against one another, while you traipse around collecting slugs or murdering children.



Should have had some Pro Plus.

The idea of blasting a hole in a child's face to retrieve their stem cells and upgrade your body is slightly unnerving...

Adam. Without a Protector, a Gatherer will attempt to run away, but corner one and threaten her and she'll give you some Adam. Similarly, you can befriend a Gatherer and receive even more Adam. Of course, if you want all the Adam, you need to put your child-murdering hat on and go hunting.

"The important thing about AI to me," continues Levine, "is not that monsters are performing cool tactics. Rather, that they're creating a believable world in which people are motivated by meaningful things and allowing you to observe these behaviours, and most importantly have the ability to interact with these behaviours. We want a world where there's an actual ecology going on. We want a relationship between all the different players in the world including you.

And more importantly, we want ways for you to interact with that ecology, have an impact on that ecology and be affected by it in ways you can plan and ways you can't."

And that's precisely where *Bioshock* differs from *System Shock 2*. With open-ended areas and a compelling world, a rich back-story waiting to be told and the sort of emergent gameplay mentality you find in sandbox games such as *Oblivion* (with a first-person RPG you just knew that reference was coming), *Bioshock* will be something very special indeed. It's a game that, in everything but name, we've been praying might happen for a long time – and a game that will 'spiritually' give the *System Shock* series the full recognition it deserves. **PC7**



New ways to scare, slash, stab, kill and survive.



Nintendo



Use the stylus as a knife and lash out at the undead as they come on smarter and faster than ever. Test your sanity in a fully 3D world of claustrophobia and tension, then drag your friends in with you for a bout of wireless multiplayer horror. Resident Evil Deadly Silence out on 31.03.06

CAPCOM



PCZONE

REVIEWS

Scaling the heights of PC gaming

REVIEWS EDITOR Suzy Wallace

Night bird

RIGHT NOW, I'M struggling to keep my eyes open thanks to a major sleep deficit. My skin is paler than a ginger girl's arse, and I've seen very little sun beyond that which hits the window opposite around three every afternoon. The reason? Well, I'm sure most of you can probably guess – as I'm betting that a good percentage of you are also suffering from exactly the same symptoms. Yes, I have a serious case of *Oblivion*-itis. On the plus side though, I can now identify at least ten different species of flower at range, so thank you Bethesda and the Alchemy skill for at last bringing out my feminine side.

While my mind is still running through just how bad the result of combining garlic with stinkhorn cap would smell, or thinking of where I can go to get some new blue suede shoes (Elvis would be proud), I should at least mention our reviews section this month. With Microsoft's innovative slant on the RTS genre, Lara Croft's return to form and *Condemned*'s rather violent take on the homeless problem, there are plenty of great titles out there to pick from this month. If I could only tear myself away from *Oblivion*...

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



GAME OF THE MONTH

66

RISE OF NATIONS:
RISE OF LEGENDS

The RTS genre gets steampunk'd

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)

The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DISCS

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X6a-64.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	128MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	1GB
Video	32MB	128MB	256MB	512MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

- 72 TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
- 78 RED ORCHESTRA: OSTFRONT 41-45
- 80 TAITO LEGENDS 2
- 80 WAR ON TERROR
- 81 SPELLFORCE 2: SHADOW WARS
- 82 ADVENT RISING
- 83 ROGUE TROOPER
- 83 ACT OF WAR: HIGH TREASON
- 84 KEEPSAKE
- 84 SHADOWGROUNDS
- 86 EVERQUEST II: KINGDOM OF SKY
- 86 BATTLEFIELD 2: EURO FORCE
- 87 PANZER ELITE ACTION
- 87 BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII
- 88 CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS
- 90 INDIEZONE

All the latest from the world of independent gaming

92 BUDGET

Medieval: Total War, Football Manager 2005, Hearts Of Iron II: Doomsday, Cold Fear and many more

95 YOUR SHOUT

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96 BUYER'S GUIDE

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PCZONE
SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
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- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at yoursout@pczone.co.uk

RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

Having been known to have had some legendary rises himself (in his younger days), we thought *Martin Korda* would be the ideal person to review this epic strategy sequel...



DEVELOPER Big Huge Games
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE
www.riseoflegends.com
ETA May 26
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

A superb sequel to *Rise Of Nations* that swaps the historical setting for a sci-fi world and again, mixes a turn-based campaign with superb, hugely tactical real-time skirmishes featuring dynamic borders.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS

ROME: TOTAL WAR **93%**

RISE OF NATIONS:
RISE OF LEGENDS **91%**

THE BATTLE FOR
MIDDLE-EARTH **91%**

AND TO THINK I was starting to despair. After a barren 2005 for strategy games, things were beginning to look pretty bleak for a genre that had taken us to new realms of pleasure the previous year with the stunning *Rome: Total War* and brilliant *The Battle For Middle-Earth*, which, coincidentally, also happened to be the last RTS we gave a Classic award to. But finally, 19 issues of your favourite PC gaming mag later, we have ourselves another strategy game worthy of our highest accolade. And it's about time too.

Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends is a game that bucks the genre's recent trend of lazy follow-ons and substandard rehashes with such aplomb, that it not only eclipses the majority of its competitors, it beats them like it's their daddy.

CREATING A LEGEND

As you probably already know, *Rise Of Legends* is the sequel to another PC ZONE Classic, *Rise Of Nations*. However, this isn't your standard rehash-of-the-original-with-better-graphics type of sequel. Oh no, no, no, far from it my warmongering friends. Instead of adopting this slapdash approach, *Legends* has focused its attentions on refining and expanding

ROL not only eclipses the majority of its competitors, it beats them like it's their daddy



Terrible static.



Capture your opponent's capital and it's game over for the bad guys.



Vinci units are based on the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci.

the original's already exquisite gaming mechanics – and the result is triumphant.

Apart from the core gameplay, there's little similarity between this and the original game. Gone is the historical earth-based setting, replaced by the sci-fi world of Aio, a planet dominated by three nations, all of whom are as diverse in culture as they are in unit types.

The Vinci is a fractious nation of industrial states, whose technology bears a strong resemblance to the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. Their units are made from cogs and pistons, and include towering

clockwork men armed with lasers, stomping walkers, mechanical spiders and some truly gargantuan super-units that have more kick than a crate of expired orange juice.

Next up are the Alin, a mysterious race of desert dwellers whose magical approach to life is in stark contrast to the Vinci's technological culture. Proficient in three schools of magic – Glass, Fire and Sand – their troops are entrenched in mysticism with fire-spewing dragons, scuttling scorpions and fat genies proving the mainstay of their armies.

Finally, you have the Cuotl, who not only sound like the noise you make when you choke on your pint, but also possess the game's most powerful and technologically advanced units – thanks to the influence of an alien race that crashed on the planet and installed themselves as gods among this primitive jungle-dwelling nation.

Divided into three campaigns centred on each race, you play as Giacomo (pronounced Jacka-mow, like you're an Italian or something), a young Vinci inventor who finds himself the unlikely saviour of a world threatened by three powerful and sinister forces.

A GAME OF TWO HALVES

Just like *Rome: Total War*, *Legends* is divided into two sections, a turn-based campaign map and a real-time 3D battlefield. However, that's where the comparisons end, as *Legends* bears far more resemblance to traditional real-time strategy games than its epic rival.

For starters, *Legends'* campaign map is simplicity itself, proving much more streamlined than *Rome's* all-encompassing freeform war zone. The idea is to move Giacomo from one province to the next, conquering each as you progress on a real-time battlefield. The more regions you capture, the more powerful you become.

Some of these provinces are simply there to help bolster your strength for the more challenging story-driven missions that are key to

Blowing Your Own Trumps

When things are looking bleak, just trump

Rise Of Legends has taken *Rise Of Nations'* campaign map's Trump Card system and injected it into its real-time battles. Across the top of your screen you have a variety of Trump Cards, or to give them their official name, Dominances, that can be called upon if things aren't going too well. These include unit-summoning spells, devastating magical attacks, temporary enforced ceasefires and possession spells that seduce enemy forces into joining your cause. Used wisely, a canny commander can harness these Dominances to turn certain defeat into a legendary victory.



Multiples Of Fun When playing with yourself isn't enough



Rise Of Legends has some of the most innovative and accessible options I've seen in an RTS for a long time. For starters, there's an intuitive search that tracks down suitable opponents of roughly the same ability. This is made possible thanks to an exhaustive collection of data that accumulates the more you play online.

But what about the multiplayer games? Well, they're pretty damn good too. You can play either free-for-all or team skirmishes, with the goals being either capturing one of the opposition's cities, all of them, or just their capital. You're given troops and plenty of resources from the outset, meaning you don't have to lose half an hour of your life building up your economy before you can even start thinking about fighting. Once the action kicks off, it's incredible to see just how many playing styles people can and do adopt. And if you hate rushers, you can even set a time limit before anyone is allowed to attack. Get yourself online pronto, because you're not going to want to miss this.



When things really kick off, battles become epic.

scattered across each level, and must be either bought (or in the case of the Cuotl, subjugated) or overrun to help extend your nation's borders beyond the reaches of your capital city.

MINE ALL MINE

As you'd expect, resources also play a huge role. However, rather than overburdening you with countless resource types like many other old-school RTS games still insist on doing, *Legends* has streamlined this often cumbersome process by only carrying two resource types: wealth (power for the Cuotl) and Timonium.

The former is generated by caravans, which dart around the map shipping goods from one outpost to the next, but their numbers are limited by the amount of economic provinces that your cities possess. Timonium however, must be mined, and it's here that *Legends* once again shows its strategic innovation.

Y'see, *Legends* doesn't allow you to build a mine on any resource patch you feel like, instead restricting you to constructing mines on patches of Timonium in your own borders. What this does is force you to leave the confines of your city and expand, and as a result, missions rarely if ever deteriorate into slow-paced bores of attrition.

completing each campaign (with each conquered territory, your power grows while the enemy's diminishes). In fact, it's imperative to plan your campaign carefully, as successes and failures have a knock-on effect towards each campaign's final confrontation.

TIME TO FIGHT

Apart from a small entourage, you begin each real-time mission from scratch, meaning that you must build up a city, army and economy before you can begin conquering any one level.

These expand-and-conquer missions are offset by an abundance of levels, which challenge you in a variety of ways. Defensive levels see you co-ordinating with sympathetic AI-controlled local factions and provide some of the game's best moments, while other mission goals include escort assignments, strike missions

(which also require co-operation with computer-controlled allies) and a smattering of quirky hit-and-miss levels that delight and irritate in equal measures.

Legends' true genius, however, doesn't lie with its superb collection of missions, challenging AI, or its expert melding of a turn-based campaign with more traditional real-time skirmishes, but with its concept of expanding and contracting territorial borders.

You begin each real-time mission with a capital city, which can be expanded with military, economic or industrial/magical provinces. A simple two-click system makes this easier than stealing a blind man's shoes, which is just as well as there's a wealth of buildings and upgrades to concentrate your attentions on instead.

The size of your capital city and holdings determine how far your national borders extend, and how much territory you possess. Neutral cities can be found





Hide behind your walls like a wuss and it'll only be a matter of time till your opponents expand around the map and become so economically powerful that they'll be able to build armies considerably larger than yours. After that, it's just a waiting game...

BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

Forced to expand, missions become thrilling races for territorial dominance, where intelligent use of terrain advantage and canny positioning of buildings and defensive structures is paramount.

Once again though, there's a twist. Just like the legendary turn-based *Civilization*

The Cuotl are a South American-type tribe that packs some meaty technology.



They'll have sand in their shoes for ages now.



Each faction's more advanced units are enormous.



Claiming the high ground can give you a huge strategic advantage.

games (to which *Rise Of Legends* bears many similarities), you can use cunning economic tactics – rather than a brutal, warmongering, military approach – to gain the upper hand.

Concentrate on expanding your cities with economic and industrial provinces and you'll soon have enough cash to buy the loyalty of neutral tribes and cities, enabling you to stretch your borders without spilling a drop of blood. And seeing that each neutral site's armies become yours once you've bought them, you'll quickly find yourself controlling a sizeable force for the final push against your opponents' capital cities.

Hide behind your walls like a wuss and it's only a matter of time till opponents expand around you



REVIEWS RON:RISEOFLEGENDS



Legends In The Making

Introducing the legendary men and women of Aio

Rise Of Legends is packed with distinctive, upgradeable and awesomely powerful hero units. Here are just a few of the ones you can look forward to controlling...



GIACOMO

The hero of the show, Giacomo is the Vinci inventor antihero who saves Aio from certain doom. Piloting a giant mechanical walker, he possesses area attacks and healing abilities. He can also create duplicates of himself.

LENORA

One of Giacomo's two love interests, this feisty female is a legendary pilot whose flying machine can fire missiles and cluster bombs. She also has the ability to subjugate enemy units.



DISTRUZZIO

A distant relation to Yahoo Serious (remember him?), this wild-haired young Einstein has a love of inventing explosives and can also summon random Vinci units to his aid. Watch out though, as he's kaaaraayzee.



But wait, there's still more. Other great features include Trump Cards that give you temporary bonuses, unique, branching tech trees for each race and a superb collection of heroes (see 'Blowing Your Own Trumps', page 67 and 'Legends In The Making', left). In fact, not since *Warcraft 3* has there been such an intelligently and imaginatively designed set of champions, with each hero blessed with unique powers and skills that either augment your armies or cripple your foes. Using these abilities wisely really can be the difference between a heroic victory or a humiliating capitulation.

So, let's say you've captured a territory and you're back on the campaign map. Now what? Now you allocate the bonus points you've earned during your last mission to various categories, that's what.

KING OF THE WORLD

Enhancing your provinces with military, economic, magical or industrial upgrades will benefit your overall war effort. Be aware that military upgrades are especially important, as the enemy will constantly attempt to retake the territory that you've wrested away from it.



Points can also be spent on boosting your heroes' powers, unlocking new units and upgrading existing ones. The sheer scope and depth of *Legends* is immense, yet its interface has been crafted with such care that you rarely if ever feel overwhelmed at the mass of options and possibilities on offer to you.

Rise Of Legends is a joy to play, a beacon of light shining out from the glut of RTS mediocrity we've been assaulted with over the past 18 months. But despite its mountainous merits, *Legends* could have been even better. Had it not been for a few shortfalls, it could have been the closest game in years to threaten *Total War's* dominance of the genre.

WHAT IF?

For starters, the plot, while fairly entertaining and at times intriguing, lacks a certain amount of direction and cohesion, often making giant leaps without adequately filling you in on essential background information and details. The tutorials also leave much to be desired. Incorporated into each campaign's early missions, they prove little more than adequate, and while there are help menus, it's a chore to have to wade through them to uncover some of the game's more subtle features. Voice-acting is also a little hit and miss, with some accents slipping more than a greasy sausage on an ice rink.

The game also seems to lose its way a little in the barren wastelands of the second (Alin) campaign, relying a little too



Packed with innovation, imagination and endless hours of enjoyment



heavily on quirky, directionless missions rather than the tightly crafted levels of the excellent Vinci and Cuoti campaigns. Don't get me wrong, the Alin campaign is by no means poor, far from it in fact, and it's perhaps testament to the sheer quality of the other two that it stands out as one of the game's weaker areas.

THE RTS IS BACK

Whatever you do though, don't let these few negative niggles put you off, because *Rise Of Legends* is a work of genuine brilliance, an RTS packed with innovation, strategy, imagination and endless hours of enjoyment. Its three factions provide one of the most diverse collections of playing approaches and unit types of any RTS

game in recent years. Plus, its multiplayer features are among the best I've seen for a long time and the game's sheer attention to detail is complemented by an interface that's more streamlined than a bullet.

Despite being more focused than its predecessor (thanks to its story-driven/freeform campaign), *Legends* still possesses more than enough freedom and scope to satiate the tactical cravings of even the most hardened commander.

By taking all that's best from the real-time build-and-conquer template, mixing it with elements of *Civilization* and *Total War*, and wrapping it up in an impressive (though not quite eye-popping) engine, Big Huge Games have taken the genre in a bold and exciting new direction.

Put simply, *Rise Of Legends* is the *Rome: Total War* of traditional strategy games – and the title that's finally put an end to a barren period for the genre. And with *Medieval 2* and *Supreme Commander* on their way, this could just be the start of a very exciting new era for RTS gaming. Here's hoping. **PC7**

PCZONE

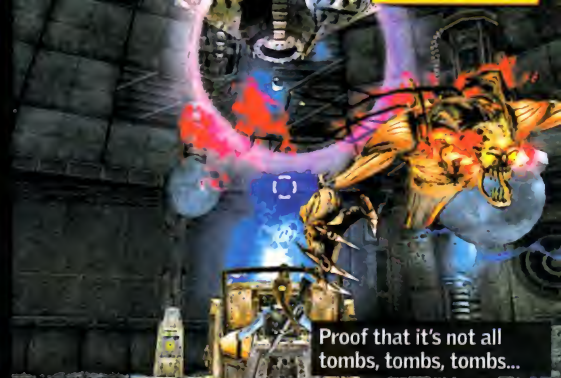
Graphics Huge improvement over the original, but hardly cutting-edge
Sound Generally faultless musical score, with the occasional duff track
Multiplayer 2 to 8-player skirmish

- ✓ Three incredibly different nations to play as
- ✓ Straightforward yet highly entertaining campaign map
- ✓ Brilliant, thrilling and massively tactical real-time battles
- ✓ Excellent selection of Hero units
- ✓ Easy to play but still incredibly deep
- ✗ Alin campaign could have been better

91
Legendary



Lara's breasts are kept in by a mixture of Blu-Tack and Gloy Gum.



Proof that it's not all tombs, tombs, tombs...



Lara was glad she'd packed the Kendal Mint Cake.

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

It's the last-chance saloon for Lara – either she produces the goods or *Dave Woods* delivers the last rites...

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE
www.tombraider.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

You don't need to reinvent the wheel, as Crystal Dynamics prove with a solid outing for Lara Croft. It's the least she deserves.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES	86%
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND	81%
TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS	68%

I'M NOT SURE when things started getting out of hand with Lara Croft. She's been on the cover of the late great *Face* magazine (where she was compared to Pamela Anderson and Yoda), the subject of numerous feminist academic research papers and she's been described as both a cultural icon and 'one of the most fascinating and enigmatic figures of our time' (by the developers of course). She's starred in a couple of ropey films and been used to sell everything from Lucozade to AT&T mobiles. The trouble is, when you start concentrating on extra-curricular activities like this, your day job suffers and one of the things that made her famous – the *Tomb Raider* games – have now made her a laughing stock.

So it's make or break time. And despite fearing the worst, the good news which I'll get out of the way early doors, is that there's plenty of life in the old dog yet. Crystal Dynamics have taken the essence of *Tomb Raider*, tightened the dynamics and delivered a solid, if short, game without any visible bugs.

It kicks off with a flashback – a narrative device that's used throughout the game to piece together Lara's past – to a plane crash in Nepal, before moving to the present-day and the obligatory tutorial

which deposits you in a good old-fashioned tomb. And this is where you get on with what Lara does best – solving puzzles, pushing and pulling crates and dispatching bad guys and endangered wildlife with your trusty pistols. And while it doesn't manage to create the same sense of awe as the original, you have to put that down to the fact that we're spoilt for choice these days.

HELPING HAND

The pacing of the game is almost perfect. You're propelled through the game on the edge of your seat without spending too much time working out where to go or what you're supposed to be doing. Regular checkpoints mean that you never have to backtrack more than one puzzle (or several somersaults) if you die, but it never feels like you're on rails. Everything's been designed to make the game flow as smoothly as possible.

Take the new grappling hook, which you use to retrieve crates or swing to remote areas of the level. Rather than letting you work out which objects you can use through trial and error, relevant surfaces shimmer to give you a visual clue. And if that's not enough, you can use your binoculars to analyse objects and see whether you can move them, grab them

or shoot them. In addition, your new 'accurate-aim' crosshair changes colour to ram the message home, as well as letting you shoot precisely at remote targets.

This perfect balance carries through to the puzzles, which are on the right side of frustrating, while being entirely logical and hard enough to give you a real sense of satisfaction when you crack them. (I must admit to almost whooping after cracking one first time, but thankfully I came to my senses in time.) The developers have even managed to avoid relying on obtuse methods of dispatching the end-of-level bosses, although the final battle is keyboard-smashingly hard, especially if you get sucked in without the maximum number of health packs.

GOING UNDERGROUND

The story takes in a huge span of Lara's life, and it's a quest to discover what happened to her mum and best friend Amanda, both of whom are missing presumed dead. And while much has been made of the fact that *Legend* takes Lara back underground, good game design means you don't have to keep a good woman down to provide the necessary thrills. In the eight (big) levels, you traverse the globe, taking in not only tombs, but a military base,



Legend doesn't try anything new – it just reminds you how good the *Tomb Raider* games used to be before the madness took over

Here be dragons... Not the winged variety, but the scent of a much-maligned arcade game



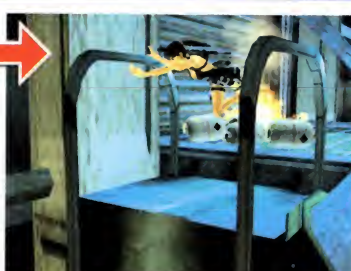
You play a part in Lara's cinematics. Here the floor falls away beneath her feet, and if you don't hit the correct key combos you're going with it.



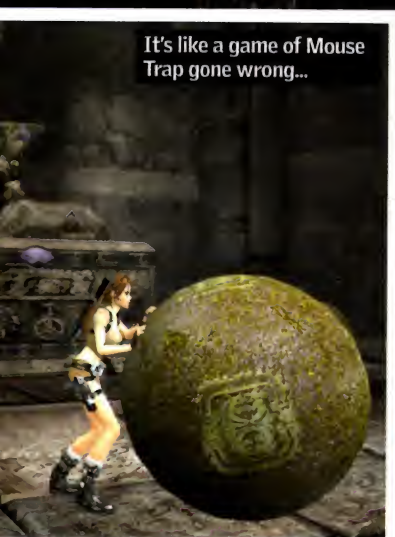
As soon as the direction arrow flashes on screen, you've got a split-second to react. Anyone remember Dirk and Dragon's Lair?



Press the wrong key or stare for too long before realising you're supposed to be doing something and you're dead. Which leads to feelings of disgust...



...That soon turn to old-school pleasure as you perfect death-defying stunts with the tap of a button later on. To quote Cilla, it's a 'Lara Lara' fun. Sorry.



It's like a game of Mouse Trap gone wrong...

a museum in Cornwall and a couple of giant skyscrapers in Japan. And it's the latter level that perfectly encapsulates the new game. It's so good that I'm not going to spoil any of the details for you, aside from the fact that Lara's definitely got a bit of Posh about her in a black cocktail dress.

MORTAL COMBAT

The only criticisms I've got – and they're fairly minor in the grand scheme of things – hark back to the fact that *Tomb Raider* is a game that's a lot more comfortable on a console than a PC. You might be getting a simultaneous release across all platforms (which is most welcome), but the combat is fairly clunky – never less than playable, but definitely driven towards dual analogue sticks. Also, the visuals, while extremely pleasing to the eye and occasionally epic in

scope, aren't going to blow you away. It's a bit like criticising fast food for being unhealthy though – *Legend* was never designed as anything but a console game.

You could also (if you were nit-picking) argue that it doesn't try anything new, which points to the fact that the developers were more interested in delivering a safe but solid game than taking a flyer on anything. But again, that was – given the size of the problems that beset the series before this – entirely the right thing to do.

SHORT BUT SWEET

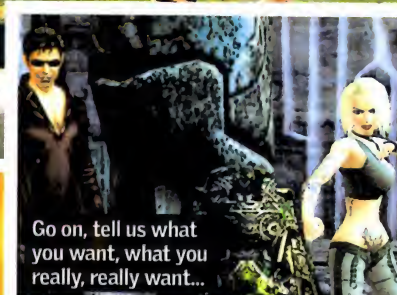
And in a way, that sets the tone for the review. If you're addressing specific, almost non-niggles like this, you have to admit the overall flow of the game is relatively spot-on. Yes it's short – about 10-12 hours should see you through – but that doesn't

detract from the quality. Although when a save game tells you you've completed 73% of the game and then one boss battle later the credits start rolling, you might feel a bit aggrieved, especially as *Legend* leaves the story hanging in mid-air. Thankfully, it's good enough to guarantee another outing, and after finishing this in two sittings I can say that not only is it hard to put down, but that this reviewer is already keenly anticipating the next chapter, and that's something I never thought I'd say about another *Tomb Raider* game.

Legend doesn't try anything new and it didn't need to. It just reminds you how good the *Tomb Raider* games used to be before the madness took over. It's not a Classic, but it's a defiant return to form and that's a huge step in the right direction. **PCZ**



The fabled snot-monster of Az'kabal proves quite a foe.



Go on, tell us what you want, what you really, really want...

PCZONE

Graphics: Goes for epic and achieves 'pleasing to the eye'
Sound: Atmospheric – especially in Nepal
Multiplayer: Nope

- ✓ Very hard to put down
- ✓ Smooth, polished and bug-free
- ✓ Puzzles and bosses perfectly pitched
- ✓ She's back!
- ✗ Fairly short

81

The stuff legends are made of



WHAT IF ?



Under attack troops defend Watchtower, 1947



Convoy attacked by Maus on route to Berlin, 1941



Maus lies in wait for allies, 1942



Allies & Axis come head to head, April 1943



Allied troops march to Berlin, 1943



Launch of first Super Weapon, 1945



Me262 takes flight, 1950



Sturmtiger awaits attack, Dec 1940

Maese take down allied mustang, June 1942

First wave of bombers hit tanks at supply depot, Sep 1939



Hitlers Coronation, Feb 1939



YOU MAY DELAY
BUT TIME WILL NOT



WWW.RUSHFORBERLIN.COM



POWERED BY
gameSpy



STORMREGION



DEEP SILVER

Powered by



3D ENGINE



Could be difficult explaining that one to the landlord.

RED ORCHESTRA: OTFRONT 41-45

Andy Robinson fights for Mother Russia

DEVELOPER Tripwire
PUBLISHER Valve/Destineer
WEBSITE
www.redorchestrage.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$24.95 (£15)



AT A GLANCE...

A WWII shooter with a difference; no star-spangled banner, only Russian comrades and a lot of red stars.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

BATTLEFIELD 2 94%

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE 79%

RED ORCHESTRA: OTFRONT 41-45 78%

SOMETIMES IT'S NICE to dive into a game world – one with a backdrop from Suzy's favourite war – forget all about the trials and tribulations of everyday life and just shoot some Nazis. But on the other side of the coin, sometimes it's fun to wrap yourself in a videogame simulation, whip out your calculator and approximate the velocity and shot angle of every single shell you triumphantly blast into the stratosphere. *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45* is an honest preacher of the second immensely in-depth game method.

Red Orchestra's story is a long and eventful one. Starting off as a humble *UT2004* mod, the Soviet blaster burst to stardom when it won Epic and NVIDIA's 'Make Something Unreal' contest, snatching a licence for both the Unreal 2.5 and Unreal 3 engines worth a handsome \$350,000 – that's enough to buy 583,333 Scotch eggs. *Red Orchestra* has since joined the ever-expanding Steam roster as a standalone game, causing a strange paradox where Valve publish Unreal Engine games.

Thankfully, as the name would suggest, the WWII setting in *Red Orchestra* isn't the

Who's been on the Stella again?

Accuracy

Automatic weapons are most accurate w in short, controllable bursts.



usual American willy-waving we've been subjected to for years in the *Medal Of Honor* games. *Ostfront* puts you in the Stalinist boots of the hard-nosed Communist Russians – still shooting Nazis – but with nifty-looking trenchcoats and a copious amount of Smirnoff sitting back at the

barracks. Stalingrad is better than any beach landing, anyway.

FLY THE RED FLAG

The game is primarily a multiplayer affair, but it does include a single-player 'practice' mode, although the bots are about as daft



"You can't miss – it's the size of a house."



Someone's set fire to a skip again.

Unseen footage from the '43 Shredded Wheat campaign.



as your average *Weakest Link* contestant. We'd like to think that *Red Orchestra* is what you'd end up with if *Battlefield* and *Day Of Defeat* had a baby – without the ugly baby-shower skirmishes and messy divorce case. The infantry combat is straight *DOD* with all of the prone positions and abilities you're familiar with, while the vehicles and environments give off a strong whiff of EA's war effort – only drenched in pain-staking realism.

That's what makes *Red Orchestra* so different from the other World War II games out there – every facet of the game's design has been researched and tweaked so that it's represented with the utmost realism. Tanks aren't your standard 'hop in

and go for a ride' affair – they actually require a three-man crew to operate properly, and you're limited to a minuscule viewing window with which to fight the battle. Weapon damage is susceptiblely lethal; bullets, shells and armour all have realistic physical properties and weapon recoil is among the most convincing we've ever seen.

ALMOST REAL

Obviously, this immediately steers *Red Orchestra* towards a certain kind of gamer who's never happier than when messing around with levers, or measuring the wind speed to get a tank up a hill. If you've got a bunch of chaps manning a tank you can have some very satisfying battles – certainly of a greater depth than your average *Battlefield* blast-athons. Sadly, as ever, most servers we've come across are full of champion idiots, and vehicle crusades usually involve getting wrapped around the nearest tree.

The meat of the game modes involves securing and manning objectives around the map, while fending off the opposing

Armoured-plated coffin

"I'm not being funny but do you think the windscreen's a bit small?"



"Push the clutch! No it's the other pedal!"

Underneath *Red Orchestra's* shiny fur coat lies a familiar beast, one that's quickly dominated by *Battlefield 2*

team. Character classes have a massive selection of weapons to choose from and help keep things very strategic, with vehicles staying reserved for certain player types 'qualified' to operate them. We found this to be a very wise design choice as the rampant 'vehicle hogging' ever present in the *Battlefield* games is void on the *Red Orchestra* battlefield, while infantry combat is balanced enough to avoid being completely useless.

We'd love to chat about the many tiny areas of *Red Orchestra* that keep us smiling, like shooting a gun out of someone's hands, or the hilariously brilliant grenade animations, but underneath its shiny fur coat lies a very familiar beast, one that's quickly dominated by *Battlefield 2* in front of all the lady-beasts of the pack. The objective-based game modes don't flow as well as *Battlefield's* extensively balanced war theatres, and the levels of quality and polish – something we might expect from this former mod – can't be compared to EA's war colossus.

But it's easy to compare *Red Orchestra* to *Battlefield 2*, when the reason this game is, and will continue to be very popular is because it succeeds at being a very different flavour of FPS. If you'd like to know what it's like to keep check on every bullet you have left, or how easy it is to parallel park a Panzer, then *Red Orchestra* is the war game for you. **PCZ**

We've never seen a game go into so much detail over the operation of a tank – something we've now given up hope of ever being able to decently manoeuvre in real life. Hop into your mechanical beastie and you're stuck inside a cramped hull with little more than a dinky letterbox through which to view your surroundings. You'll need more crew members to get your ride battle-ready, but as a solo pilot you can enjoy the extensive lever and pedal animations, climb from seat to seat or do your best to scare off approaching Nazis – hoping they don't realise that you're essentially manning a Ford Capri with an intimidating bodykit.

PCZONE

Graphics Dated but great animations
Sound 5.1 used to its full bullet-zipping potential
Multiplayer Up to 32 players online

- ✓ Excellent character and weapon animation
- ✓ Realism nuts will love it
- ✓ Convincing weaponry
- ✗ All-too-familiar gameplay can feel jaded fast
- ✗ Engine's behind the times

78

Soviet hero



TAITO LEGENDS 2

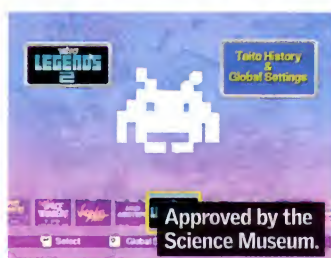
It's an oldie, but is it golden?

DEVELOPER Empire Oxford
PUBLISHER Xplosiv
WEBSITE www.taitolegends2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements ①

THERE'S ONLY ONE compilation out there that lets you beat up women, punch footballers and then fend off invading aliens with a dog basket. No, it's not *PC ZONE*'s latest stint on *FPS Creator* – it's the crazy arcade collection *Taito Legends 2*, a game with more arcade classics than Blackpool Pier.

When developing the first *Taito Legends* game, developers Empire conveniently left over enough wacky arcade games to fill up this gushing sequel – and there are some truly bizarre titles on offer. Our favourites include the 1995 *Space Invaders* update in which you can play as some kind of mysterious blue turd; *Growl*, which asks you to protect animals by roundly kicking lady poachers; and *Football Champ*, a footy game with a



list of controls reading 'shoot', 'pass' and 'punch'.

Elevator Action Returns is another excellent translation – lifts have never been so absorbing or exciting and we love it. Unfortunately, *Taito Legends 2* raises a financial dilemma; undoubtedly you're getting a good dose of entertainment with the likes of *Space Invaders* and *Puzzle Bobble 2* in the wings, but are a handful of 20-year-old games really worth *Taito Legends*' £20 asking price? If you're partial to a spot of footballer-beating, then the answer is a resounding yes.

Andy Robinson



WAR ON TERROR

Send it to Guantanamo Bay!

DEVELOPER Digital Reality
PUBLISHER Monte Cristo/Deep Silver
WEBSITE www.montecristogames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements ②

A BIT LIKE the gingerbread house from fairy tales of old, *War On Terror* beckons you in with its flashy models and pretty bloom lighting, but when you get inside you realise you're trapped in a dingy cottage with a murderous, wart-faced hag, and she's got a shit single-player campaign and some of the worst waypointing ever made.

That's right, underneath *War On Terror*'s alluring exterior lurks a far less attractive strategy game tarnishing the capable game engine. Right off the bat I'm struggling to move my troops around a corner, with a terrorist leader refusing to attack me and the chopper that just dropped off my reinforcements doing an infinite barrel-roll, like a cat with a rotisserie shoved up its arse.



Even the holiness of Canterbury Cathedral can't save *War On Terror* from a pit of mediocrity; the generic units and plot premise do very little to inspire and combat is completely barren of any sort of excitement or strategy. Sloppy implementation makes this already average strategy game just forgettable.

But perhaps I'm being too harsh; the environments are very pretty, and at least developers Digital Reality have gone out of their way to create some longevity with the three playable sides. Nope, wait, my tank's just got stuck in a hedge again.

Andy Robinson





SPELLFORCE 2: SHADOW WARS



The blood of dragons fills *Jon Blyth*. Or it could be the jalapenos from Subway

DEVELOPER

Phenomic

PUBLISHER

JoWood

WEBSITE

spellforce.jowood.com/sf2/

ETA Out now

PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

An RTS/RPG hybrid that proves to be a good addition to the games collection – not a huge evolution, but wholesome fun. Now with raisins.

System requirements



HOW IT STACKS

AGE OF EMPIRES 84%

SPELLFORCE: ORDER OF DAWN 79%

SPELLFORCE: SHADOW WARS 76%

WHEN GENRES GET mashed together, you're told you're getting the best of both worlds. A text-only first-person shootery adventure will be billed as a thrilling retro triumph with racy hints of Mavis Beacon. Then an innocent child will say, "This game straw-sucks my dad's arse," and that's that. The *SpellForce* series, combining both role-playing and strategy, are actually well-balanced and playable games, even if the most hardcore edges of both genres are necessarily compromised.

The RPG element comes from your main character and assorted heroes; these are the dolls you'll be dressing up, levelling up and spending your skills points on. This side of things is deep enough to keep you satisfied, but not so *Diablo*-deep that you'll be fretting over a massive collection of hats with barely different stats.

If you go both-toilets at the thought of open-ended *Oblivion* walkabouts, you've nothing to fear here. You're led along

maps with a main route and regular tucked-away crannies with more enemies and a treasure chest. Once you get control of a headquarters, the other side of the game kicks in – mining resources, upgrading buildings, the usual RTS management stuff. It's all familiar, but immaculately designed.

MIX AND MATCH

Once you've got your disposable troops, action can get a bit hectic, which isn't helped by a limited zoom. Occasionally, the heroes can feel unresponsive, but that's just the impatient old grumpy-puss speaking – it all comes together well, and is completely intuitive if you've got any experience. And for newcomers, the (optional) tutorial gives a right thorough grounding.

Shadow Wars is, essentially, more of the same. If you aren't a dedicated explorer of the deeper, damper crevices of RTS and RPG gaming, then there'll be enough of both styles to interest you, and

not so much to scare you off. And it's an easy game to get into, if you can suffer the disgraceful English accents.

Oh, and if you've just won a difficult battle, save the game. The whole thing is more difficult this time, and there aren't any continue points in-level. And you know how it is – the satisfaction of finally winning a battle doesn't even begin to outweigh the frustration of having to win it all over again. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics Nicely done; scrolling can be a bit ugly
Sound RPG. Epic. Women going aaahh
Multiplayer LAN/Internet skirmishes

- ✓ Well balanced
- ✓ Involving but not overwhelming
- ✓ Multiplayer options
- ✗ Can make your eyes hurt
- ✗ Kill the actors

76

Beyond a shadow of a doubt

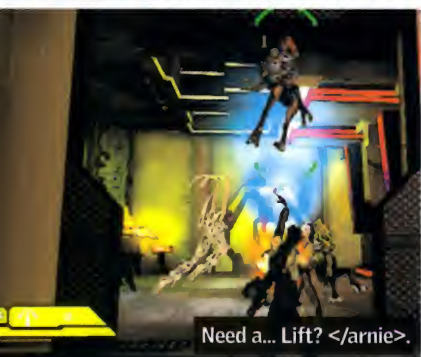




Now those cheerleaders will pay! I am pretty!



This brother's dead. Can I have another?



Need a... Lift? </arnie>.



Classic scissors-paper-stone. On three, not after. Go!



Stop mucking about.



ADVENT RISING

Jon Blyth evolves into some kind of god for fish

DEVELOPER GlyphX
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE
www.adventriling.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

GIVEN THE CHOICE between a foppish race of flap-gobbed fish who call you "exalted one" and "divine creature", and a bunch of 12ft bastards who want to scan your brain then wipe it on the walls, what would you choose? Sure, the reverence option seems attractive, but after ten minutes of a sycophantic carp saying "excuse me, super-face" and "you've got smooth hands", you'd probably be smashing your brain out yourself.

Advent Rising, with a storyline penned by space guru Orson Scott Card, is 'sci-fi epic action'. As such, planets get blown up, families get killed and after a few fist and gun battles, you're trained to realise your hidden human godliness in a training movie so gloriously clichéd that it's only missing Mr Miyagi nodding at the end.

Advent Rising looks and plays like a slightly dated arcade game. That's not too damning a criticism – it's enjoyable with it. Action is sectioned by plot and 'Hello Gideon let's go north now' cut-scenes, and the power-up method is simple and effective. Your current skills improve as quickly as you get more to play with, and there's no real exploring; just find the way forwards, keep killing, get stronger, acquire new powers, eliminate occasional bosses.

SPINNING AROUND

It's a rare third-person action game that doesn't have some camera issues, but when the action takes place in confined areas, *Advent Rising* suffers badly. This is mainly thanks to the combat system, which works by locking on – you cycle through the targets with the mouse wheel – up for left, down for right.

It works well enough after you've got used to it, but in corridors you'll end up spinning around like Kylie Minogue and Wonder Woman playing BeyBlades in a centrifuge. As for the driving levels, whoever decided to steer with the mouse deserves severed nipples –

coupled with the camera issues, this can make driving horrific.

Advent Rising feels like it's trying to be something incredibly worthy; in reality, it's just a fairly enjoyable but uninvolved power-up bonanza with enough niggles to make you wince, but enough fun to keep you going. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Above-par romp through space where everyone dies and you find you've got ace powers.

System requirements **2**

HOW IT STACKS



"You're big, but I'm special."

PCZONE

Graphics Old-school arcade feel
Sound Mmmm... Orchestral
Multiplayer Not at all sir

- ✓ Attention to plot, script and acting
- ✓ Rompy feel to gameplay
- ✗ Often maddening camera
- ✗ Deeply linear
- ✗ Isn't what it wants to be

64
Likely likey no lovey lovey



ACT OF WAR: HIGH TREASON

Worse than fair-to-middlin' treason

DEVELOPER Eugen Systems
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.atari.com/actofwar
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

System requirements 2

IT WASN'T YOUR average strategy game. *Act Of War: Direct Action* looked like the bizarre lovechild of *Command & Conquer* mixed with a rubbish, late-night Channel Five film, but somehow we loved it. It wasn't a revolution in the RTS genre, but it sported an excellent Campaign mode combined with a strong (if ridiculous) plot and Communist Russians – a crucial addition for RTS fans everywhere.

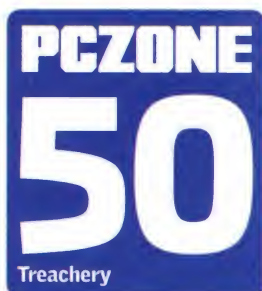
Imagine our horror then, when the expansion turns out to have less quality craftsmanship than a Formula One car made out of wet cardboard. Major additions include – and are sadly limited to – a bunch of sneaky Mercenary units, brand new naval combat and all the obligatory (and slight) balances and unit tweaks you'd expect from your average RTS expansion.



The Mercenary units are a welcome addition to the unit roster; they cost a pretty penny to deploy on the battlefield but they're fast, powerful and add a whole new element to multiplayer skirmishes. The naval combat, on the other hand, is far less enthralling. While there's a healthy variety of subs and boats to get wet with, they all move around like Pavarotti on a pushbike, failing to navigate even the simplest of sea routes laid out for them.

If you're still feverishly playing *Act of War: Direct Action* online, then *High Treason* could be worth your careful consideration. Otherwise, avoid it like a poo-covered insurance salesman. With SARS.

Andy Robinson



ROGUE TROOPER

Bio-chips beyond the grave-y

DEVELOPER Eidos
PUBLISHER Rebellion
WEBSITE www.roguetrooper.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 3

REBELLION BLEW A couple of hats off with their first 2000AD conversion; *Dredd Vs Death* took two of the best-known characters from the stable, and now it's Rogue's turn for his first digital daytrip since the days of 16-bit. And there aren't any crates of Red Bull lying around, either.

First off, it looks good, in a grimy war-torn way. The controls tutorial starts with the presumption that you've been holding a pillow to your face since *Quake*, but as Rogue's squad are killed and their bio-chips incorporated into his equipment, it starts to become fun to play.

The weapons you discover from blueprints and the powers you gain from your friends (decoys, sentry guns, upgrades, micro-mines) aren't ground-breaking, but they're diverse and faithful to their roots.

It isn't a hugely challenging third-person shooter though, and the tutorial is too mothering for too long.



Perhaps it's just me, but when Gunnar said, "Take cover, there's too many of them," I refused because it wasn't my idea. And I died. So thanks, Gunnar.

Finally though, kudos to the scriptwriters and actors for providing a stream of banter that never once made me want to pull my jaw off and mash my teeth against my forehead. Something so rare, I added two to the score.

Jon Blyth



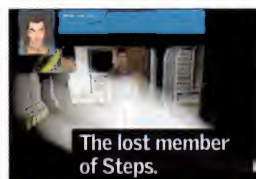


SHADOWGROUNDS

Something's moving down there...

DEVELOPER Frozenbyte
PUBLISHER Reef Entertainment
WEBSITE www.shadowgroundsgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements ①



TO ANY GAMER worth their salt, the sheer mention of aliens and space marines inspires drowsiness in the same calibre as a large dose of Rohypnol. Thank goodness then that *Shadowgrounds* isn't a by-the-numbers FPS, or we'd be asleep at our desk dreaming of the time we found a fiver in the nightclub toilets.

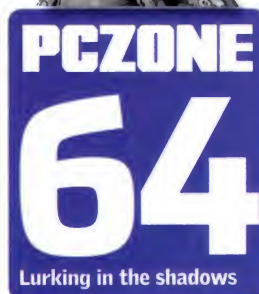
Shadowgrounds is actually a nostalgic top-down action affair – something we haven't seen since long ago, when the chavs now hanging around on our road were throwing toys out of their Burberry prams. However, with some rather luscious lighting and shadow effects, *Shadowgrounds* turns out to be a satisfying renaissance for the long-missed genre.

Swanning around a downed moonbase and shooting hordes of aliens is the aim of the game. The mouse and keyboard interface are well-utilised and enemies are easily

dispatched with a quick cursor manoeuvre. The obligatory shooter weapons all make an appearance too – shotgun, rifle, flamethrower – and can all be upgraded with 'part' pickups for that extra personal touch.

Sadly, *Shadowgrounds*' success doesn't extend to production: the story is at sub-porno levels and vain attempts at scare tactics are laughable. Plus, while there's a large variety of enemies and boss creatures, *Shadowgrounds* still isn't what you'd call challenging. Still, if you like a bit of retro, go ahead.

Andy Robinson



KEEPSAKE

When voiceovers attack

DEVELOPER Lighthouse Interactive
PUBLISHER Wicked Studios
WEBSITE www.lighthouse-interactive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements ①



LIGHTHOUSE INTERACTIVE, THIS year: "Onto *Keepsake*."

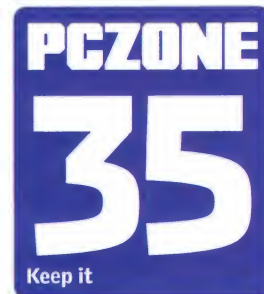
We've got a few maths puzzles – thanks, Terry – and some lovely pictures of fountains. All we need is the animations and script. How're they coming along?" Some coughing from the end of the table. "Can the dragon be a dog? I can't do the wings. And Toby reckons it doesn't matter what people say if they talk in a shrill whine."

Keepsake is a mini-Myst adventure with toe-curling characters and a few nice puzzles. You first meet Mustavio, an Italian trader who makes Mario sound like Isaac Hayes. And if his castrato screech doesn't finger your gag-switch, then your game-long companion is a cowardly dragon trapped in a husky's body, who's scared of heights and screams at virtually every door you come across. Can you imagine? How irritating that is?

Keepsake might not anger and nauseate a very young audience, and with the game's theme of a couple of girls who swapped dollies and promised to be best friends forever, you might buy this for your least clever daughter. There's even an in-game walkthrough that tells you in excruciating detail what to do next (luckily, as your immediate goals veer from obvious to huh?). Plus, it explains and solves the intermittent puzzles, should you get stuck and start crying.

If you've got a daughter or effeminate son who's just finished *Barbie's Glitterpurse Academy*, then *Keepsake* might not be awful. Just make sure they wear headphones.

Jon Blyth



WITH THE TECHNOLOGY OF

2013

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Available now on
PC DVD-ROM

"The last 5 years of waiting have been worthwhile and [PC] GR fans will not be disappointed"

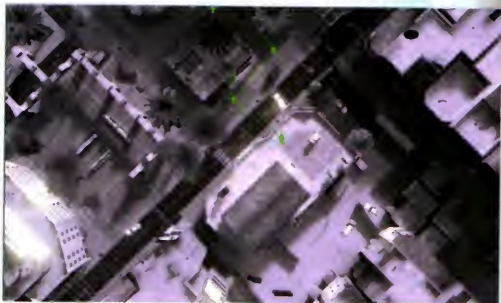
- ColinCJ (Official Ghost Recon Forums)

"The most intense urban combat simulation ever seen on any platform"

- PC Format



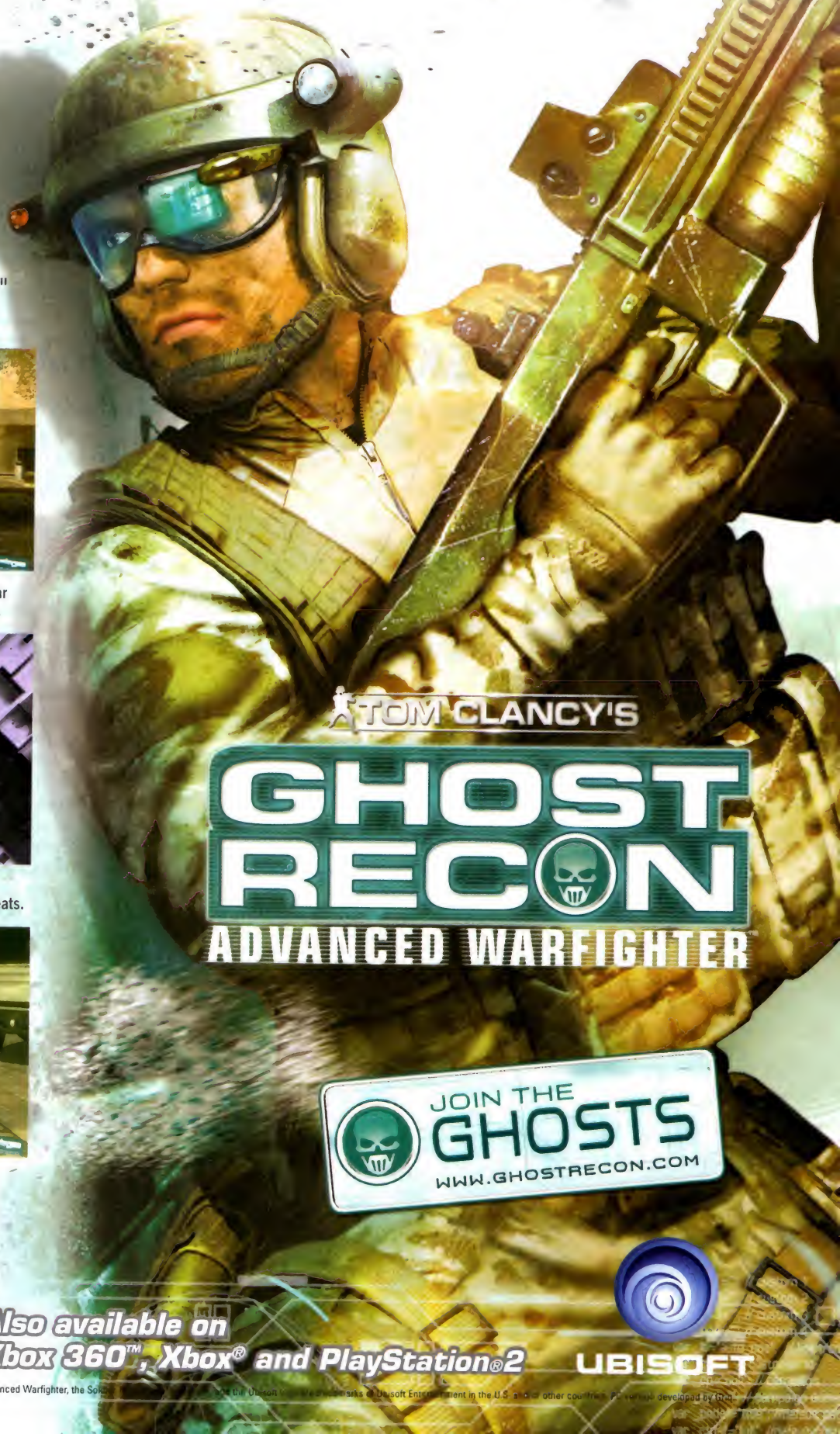
Actual military prototype weapons such as the modular Crye assault rifle and wall piercing countersnipe rifles.



Master the CROSS-COM and the tactical intel map to implement air strikes or alert your team to hidden threats.



Up to 32 players on new online modes and 4 players on the Co-op Campaign.



TOM CLANCY'S

GHOST RECON

ADVANCED WARFIGHTER



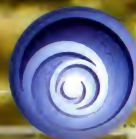
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EVERQUEST II: KINGDOM OF SKY

Look to the heavens

DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE everquest2.station.sony.com/expansions/kingdomofsky
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 3

THE WHEELS AT Sony Online Entertainment continue to turn and this time around, the second *EverQuest II* expansion has popped out. Featuring a new achievements system, a guild cap increase to 50 and level cap to 70; plus the addition of several PvP servers, access to the Overrealm and more, there's definitely plenty of content, but it's squarely aimed at the higher-level player.

The Overrealm consists of three groups of floating islands in the skies above Norrath and features plenty of new creatures, from carnivorous plants to birdmen – although, with everything being level 50+, this isn't the place for newcomers. Numerous dungeons also litter the islands, offering yet more chances for XP and tasty loot, while travel between is facilitated by magical, camp clouds.



Alongside the extra content, SOE's seen fit to have a fiddle with gameplay. This is mostly a plus point, but it's inevitably inconvenienced some of the player community. In particular, those using trade skills seem to have had a rough ride this time round.

With Blizzard's behemoth *WOW* bounding ahead in terms of players, it's hard to feel that SOE haven't missed out on a trick here by providing an expansion that appeals to players of all levels, hopefully attracting some new blood to the title. What they have provided though is a solid expansion with plenty of content to keep its existing high-level players from flying the nest. For now.

Suzy Wallace



BATTLEFIELD 2: EURO FORCE

EA starts raking in the Euros

DEVELOPER EA/DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.ea.com/official/battlefield/battlefield2/us
ETA Out now
PRICE \$9.99 (£6)

System requirements 4

EA marketing ploy #6,426: release a booster pack which contains minimal content, allow people to play on servers running the booster pack, but kick them off as soon as any of the three new maps are loaded up. Charge \$9.99. Ignore torrent of shoes angrily thrown at the EA office windows. Repeat.

Ouch. If this is EA's new regime, then playing *Battlefield 2* online is about to get quite confusing, and even more irritating for people not willing to hand over credit card details for four new vehicles, three new maps, seven new weapons and a fictional EU army. (Pedants: an EU Rapid Reaction Force does actually exist, but definitely not in the 'je suis la baguette' context in which *Euro Force* depicts them.) The maps are great, the vehicles include the

Challenger 2 tank and the Eurofighter Typhoon, the classy Steyr AUG is strangely absent, and of course, the citizens of the fine country of Europe are portrayed in the usual 'zee Madonna viz zee boobies' fashion.

It's fundamentally flawed though – as it's just content, servers currently aren't flagged as running it, causing segmentation and frustration for the have-nots (which will only increase as more packs are released), and sticking a price tag on it is simply ludicrous. You can download content of similar or even better quality for free off the Internet. Sorry guys, but we don't appreciate the thought.

Steve Hogarty





BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

Fly, fly away

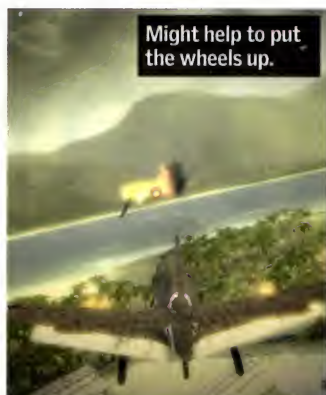
DEVELOPER Ubisoft
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.blazing-angels.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2

AS FAR AS flying titles go, *Blazing Angels* skips the 500-page manuals of a hardcore sim and goes straight for the arcade jugular. It's got a flying model that's easy enough for the most rookie of pilots, unlimited ammo and the ability to repair your plane in mid-flight.

Flying around is pretty enjoyable, and as the game features most of the major air battles of WWII – from defending the Houses Of Parliament in *The Battle For Britain* to taking out the Japanese fleet in *Midway* – it also offers good variety in terms of mission type and planes to pilot.

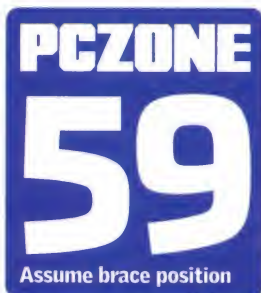
The main selling point, however, is the squad-based system, with a small squadron of planes that fly alongside you offering some extra abilities, from an ace pilot to an engineer who can repair damage to your plane. Unfortunately, as well



as dispelling the last remnants of realism, this also makes the game so easy your five-year-old niece could shoot down the Red Baron.

Add to that some disappointing graphics on the ground, a handful of bugs (our plane exploded three times on the runway before we even got to take control and we couldn't get two joypads to work), and the fact that the title's hardly progressed the genre since the last big arcade flying title (*Secret Weapons Over Normandy*, already over two years old), and this is one title that we can't help but shoot down in flames.

Suzy Wallace



PANZER ELITE ACTION

Not a particularly butch acronym

DEVELOPER Deep Silver
PUBLISHER JoWooD
WEBSITE www.panzereliteaction.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 3

HELLO. I'M A long-standing Nazi and fan of 'Allo 'Allo. So the chance to drive a tank full of bickering Germans into a series of stunning victories for the Third Reich was like seeing two unattainable dreams mating in the sky and showering my open face with their barely-gestated offspring.

If you're not acquainted with sarcasm, it's the lowest form of humour and I'm sorry. And it's not all Nazis; through the game, you get to play Russians and Americans too – a regular global trundle patrol.

PEA isn't geared towards simulation – it's action. Shoot a house with a machine gun and it catches fire. Drive your tank over a broken bridge and you explode immediately. It's like that *Family Guy* episode where the horse falls off a cliff, vibrates and blows up.

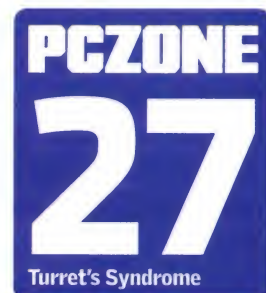
The monolithic, insurmountable let-down? The action is as dynamic as waking up paralysed, except without the same fun sense of panic. Being a



tank, you're limited to moving slowly, being a bit shit on slopes and corners and blowing things up. And that's what you do, only mostly while hanging around repair sheds, so you can effectively fight with infinite health and shells. Gameplay tweaks (formations, calling air raids, giving escorts etc) don't distract from the game's repetitive core.

PEA just isn't varied enough to feel like anything other than a level from a better game. That level you hated.

Jon Blyth





CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

Suzy Wallace helps the homeless. To a beating...

DEVELOPER Monolith
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE
www.condemnedgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Creepy first-person beat 'em up that combines elements of *CSI* and *Se7en* to create some brutal and genuinely scary moments.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

FEAR 90%

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK 86%

CONDEMNED 85%

SOME GAMES CAN teach you things. In the case of *Catz and Dogz*, it's responsibility and kindness; in *Rome: Total War*, it's diplomacy and tactics; but the only things you'll learn from *Condemned* is why it's not always a good idea to be kind to the homeless and how effective a crowbar is should you want to cave someone's head in.

Condemned puts you in the shoes of Ethan Thomas, an FBI officer sent to investigate the latest grisly death perpetrated by a serial killer. Things soon start to go a bit wrong though, and before you know it, the serial killer's not only shot your boss and another police officer, but has also framed you for their murders, putting you as high on the wanted list as himself.

The game revolves around you tracking this strange figure, trying to clear your name and catch the bad guy at a time when the entire city's lowlife population seem to be picking up weapons, starting fights and generally causing some major mischief. *Condemned* superbly combines a massive dose of unsettling suspense, some brutal melee combat and the occasional bout of forensic investigation as you attempt to unravel the clues left by the serial killer.

Using a variety of weird-looking objects taken straight from the screens of *CSI*, you have to pinpoint areas of interest and then capture them using another bizarre implement. All evidence is then sent through your mobile to your only real help in the game, Rosa, who explains the situation a little more. Enjoyable as these *CSI*-style parts are, they're pretty spaced out and don't offer much in terms of gameplay, feeling more tacked-on to make the story work than an integral part of the game.

NOT BANG BANG

Where *Condemned* really does excel though is the combat. Although guns do feature, they're rarer than rocking-horse poo (and ammo is non-existent), so the main emphasis here is on melee. This is an area that's often overlooked in games, especially in the realms of the FPS (apart from *The Chronicles Of Riddick*), where it's never really seemed like a decent alternative to an arsenal of guns.

Monolith's done an amazing job with *Condemned*'s combat; it's brutal, visceral and hard-hitting, and for once it doesn't feel at all out of place on the PC. Weapons consist of pretty much anything that you can pick up from your surroundings, from lead pipes

to locker doors. You can then use them with a combination of left- and right-clicks to swing and block respectively, and combine with the middle mouse-button to zap your enemies with your tazer.

FIGHT CLUB

Thanks to this physical side of combat the fighting's especially harsh, with blood splattering the screen, thugs being twirled around by the force of blows and superb fighting animations. Your opponents are no slouches with weapons either; they block, feint and counter, affording at least one surprise per level. This means that just when you thought you had a fight in the bag, you have ten bells of crap beaten out of you by a goddamn hobo.

They also make good use of the creepy surroundings, from hiding behind pillars to ripping makeshift weapons off the wall. Plus, rest assured that if they manage





Lowlifes 0, Conduit 3.



Wonder if it picks up BBC4.



Not a copy of the *Big Issue* in sight...

If you're after genuine scares and physical combat, *Condemned* takes some beating

to find a superior weapon before you, they'll be sure to get their grubby little mitts to it.

SOUNDS BAD

The entire title bristles with atmosphere, from the level design (dilapidated buildings to subway stations) to the in-game characters, and the overall feeling of unsettling tension is helped along nicely by some of the best use of sound we've heard. The absence of any real soundtrack in the background amplifies any environmental noises too, so there's no distraction from the muffled sounds of someone coughing round the corner or footsteps on the floor above designed to freak you out. Enemy vocals are

also handled superbly, with thugs screaming obscenities and other incomprehensible noises of indignation before they attack.

As long as you're not some kind of hippy who abhors violence, besides the slightly repetitive level design, the game is a masterpiece of nerve-jangling tension the first time round. However, the linear levels, short length (ten hours of play), story that's never fully explained and lack of multiplayer don't offer much in the way of replay value.

Despite this, if you're after genuine scares and great physical combat, *Condemned* takes some beating. So get in there with that crowbar and give it hell. **PCZ**

Flipping The Bird

Chirp, tweet, chirp, tweet, splat



Would you pick this up?

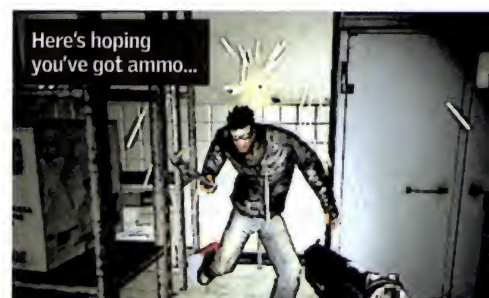
PCZONE

Graphics Dark and gritty urban environments
Sound Sound effects to make you nervous
Multiplayer Not a hobo in sight

- ✓ Tense, unsettling atmosphere
- ✓ Superb, creepy sound effects
- ✓ Macabre character design
- ✗ Repetitive level design
- ✗ Too short

85
Hobo-hitting heaven

With its mean and moody settings and adult story, *Condemned* draws you right in from the beginning, but there are some bits which are never quite explained. Like, just why the hell are birds dying all over the city? And why does it seem to be sending the city's lowlife into a homicidal funk? And is it just a coincidence that bird flu is currently spreading throughout Europe? Well, one thing's for sure: I'm keeping a close eye on the homeless from now on. Any attempt to run at me and they'll get a beating. Just don't tell Shelter.



indiezone

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our discs.

 **Martin Korda** defends some towers, dons some spandex, jumps on some platforms and discovers it's raining balls. Just another month then...

MASTER OF DEFENSE

DEVELOPER Voodoo Dimension WEBSITE www.towerdefence.com PRICE \$19.84 (£11)



HOW CAN SOMETHING so simple be so much fun? On the surface, *Master Of Defense* seems painfully simplistic, almost embarrassingly so: line a path with defensive towers in order to repel ever-larger waves of enemies. See what I mean?

Yet beneath this almost patronising exterior lies a game of subtle tactical brilliance. There are numerous turrets on offer that can attack either land or air targets, or ones with specific skills, such as freezing foes in order to make them easier to hit.

Add to this the ability to upgrade each turret, some excellent RPG elements that allow you to allocate experience

points to a variety of skills for your defences and the necessity to really think about where to place each tower, and you're left with one hugely addictive defensive experience.

While it's hardly *Total War*, *Master Of Defense's* excellent mix of action, strategy and humour will devour more than enough of your time to justify the outlay. Don't believe me?

Check out the demo and see for yourself. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

**INDIEZONE
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

**PCZONE
70**

WRESTLING ENCORE

DEV Mat Dickie WEBSITE www.mdickie.com PRICE \$14.99 (£8)

EASILY ONE OF the most ambitious indie offerings yet, *Wrestling Encore* promises much but doesn't quite live up to its billing.

The game's sheer wealth of options is staggering, providing a career mode in which you lead a wannabe wrestler to stardom. From customising your wrestler's look and skills to training them up and negotiating contracts, one-man band Mat Dickie has done a superb job in creating a believable and compelling world in which to ply your trade.

Newspaper reports track your progress, while crowds must be won over with skill and showmanship. In fact, everything is excellent until you step into the ring, then it all goes wrong...

Matches are cumbrous, with wrestlers moving like they're in treacle, while the controls are horribly unwieldy and your wrestler unresponsive. It's a shame, as all the elements for success are here. *WE* goes down as a missed opportunity.



**PCZONE
56**

NIKWI

DEVELOPER Slashtone WEB www.slashstone.com PRICE \$9.95 (£6)

NOT QUITE AS shit as it looks, but still hardly impressive, *Nikwi* is a by-the-numbers platformer in which you must jump around collecting items while avoiding contact with creatures, their faeces and an array of other putrid projectiles that are thrown at you as you hop around some ever-more enemy-infested locales.

Nikwi really does have 'indie' written all over it in massive neon letters,

smacking of amateurishness in almost every department. The lack of a score is the first faux pas, while some dodgy collision detection mars the otherwise pleasant, brainless gameplay.

Ultimately, it's hard to see anyone above the age of seven getting much out of it – but as an introduction to gaming for kids, it's just about worth it.

PCZONE
40



RAINBALL

DEVELOPER Defacto Games WEB www.defactogames.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)



WHEN IT COMES to melding different games together, you won't find a much stranger mishmash of ideas than *Rainball*. Sitting somewhere between *Space Invaders*, *Keepy Uppy* and *Quake*, *Rainball*'s general premise is to keep a ball in the air with railgun-type shots, while firing through a moving paddle in order to blow the ball up. The further you get in the game, the more balls you need to keep in the air at a time.

If you're looking to challenge your hand/eye co-ordination skills, then *Rainball* is a decent testing ground, requiring speedy reactions and forethought in equal measures, especially later on in the game when you're juggling multiple spheres.

But with only a handful of power-ups on offer and with the core gameplay incredibly samey, it's not long before you wander off in search of something a little more fulfilling. Like scraping out the dirt from between your toes. Oh, and it's a bit pricey, too.

PCZONE
45



Developer Q&A

THE WHITE ELEPHANT TEAM

Company: White Elephant
Website: www.elephant-games.com
Games: *Jungle Heart*, *Road Rush*, *Avalon* and *RIP*

PCZ Tell us about your company?

WE The company was founded by Andrey Pahmutov, Peter Efimov and Dmitry Kuklin. We've now grown to a team of seven.

PCZ Tell us a bit about your last game, *RIP*?

WE *RIP* was supposed to be a small four-week project. But while we were developing it, we kept adding more and more features, making it into the game it is now.

PCZ What's your ethos towards making indie games?

WE Love what you're making. Sure, we have to take into account the commercial side of things, but we aim to find a good balance.

PCZ What advice would you give other budding indie developers?

WE Be prepared to work hard for several years, and be patient and enthusiastic about your games. Also, learn to love doing work you hate so that one day you get the chance to do the things you love. It's important to find a way to relax too – when your hobby becomes your work, you need to look for another hobby.

PCZ Best thing about indie gaming?

WE Theoretically, nobody limits your ideas. However, it's not always so, since indie developers must strictly follow the demand of the market. So the best thing about indie gaming is that it still exists at all.



BUDGET

Reduced to shopping at Aldi? Then *Suzy Wallace* has just the games for you

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

IF THE GIFTED but goofy child is *Hearts Of Iron II* (see opposite), then *Medieval: Total War* is the nearly-as-clever but more athletic older brother who can do backflips when losing an intellectual argument. And in anticipation of the sequel planned for release around the end of the year, Mastertronic have brought out the original title complete with the *Viking Invasion* expansion for a tenner.

The game jigsaws the turn-based strategy and large-scale troop management of the world map with the 'oh-my-lord-look-at-that' element of thousands of troops running around in a real-time 3D war sim. Like *Hearts Of Iron II*, it has a hardcore edge – there's an

enormous number of realistic influences, battles can be hectic, and if you don't maintain good tactics, you'll find your men breathlessly dead. It's not a game to fritter away an hour – expect to dedicate weeks and months.

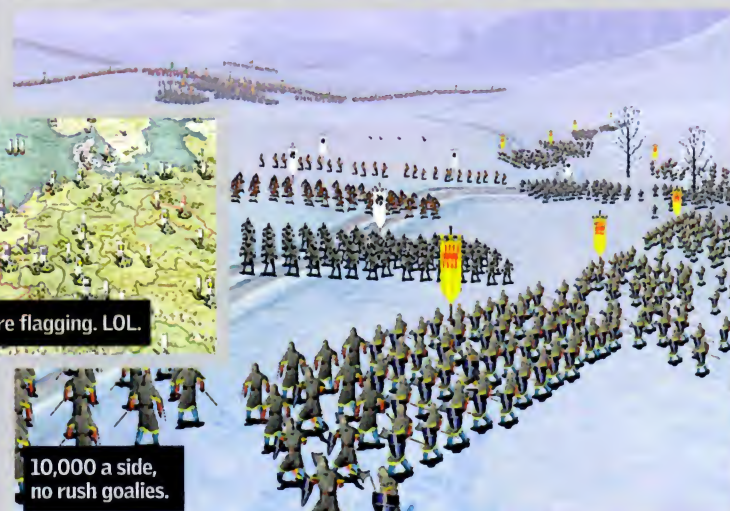
It's been four years, and although it might be showing its age, there's still the great scope, smart AI and excellent music that'll potentially keep you interested until the sequel arrives.



PCZONE
89



BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH



THIS MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...

PC ZONE staff having their food and drink paid for over 14 days of press trips:
Saving: £630



Clare demanding, and somehow getting, a discount on solicitors fees:
Saving: £500



Log's unfettered access to a bucket of schnitzel:
Saving: £3,00



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

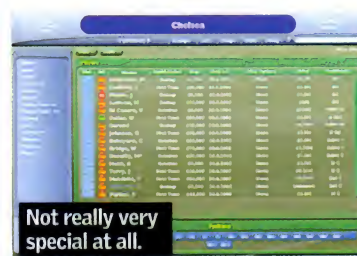
A WEEK IS A long time in football, never mind a year, but this budget release of Sports Interactive's first *Football Manager* game is still a must-buy for lovers of the beautiful game. Previously responsible for the legendary *Championship Manager* series, SI took their stats-heavy recreation of football management and radically designed the interface to make negotiating team changes, transfers and other stuff far more intuitive.

Additions since the developers' last *Champ Man* game (Season 03/04) include a pre-match comparison of teams and a new split-screen so you can track any info you like during matches. Featuring more than 150 divisions in over 50 countries, plus in excess of 5,300 players, the scope of *Football Manager* is

brehtaking – although the game does chug from time-to-time.

Despite an update last year, the stats and teams are somewhat out-of-date, but even this doesn't detract from an insanely addictive footie sim that's still vastly superior to the recent non-SI produced *Championship Manager 2006*.

PCZONE
88



HEARTS OF IRON II: DOOMSDAY

PUBLISHER Deep Silver WEBSITE www.paradoxplaza.com PRICE £14.99



The thing with...

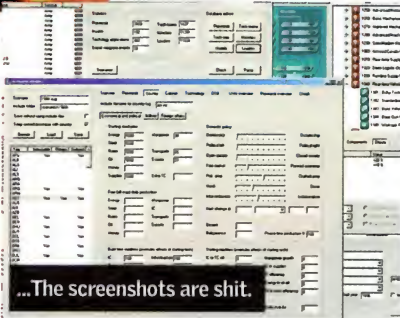
HEARTS OF IRON II is the buck-toothed geek genius of real-time strategy games. Sure, it looks like its had its head flushed in the toilet, but underneath the unspectacular surface is a thoughtful and intricate war game that manages to

balance a daunting depth with a good level of accessibility. As long as you don't go into it expecting a few quick skirmishes and awesome 3D battle scenes, you'll enjoy getting your fingers dirty.

The *Doomsday* expansion includes the full game at half the price, and adds six years to the timeline (now running from 1935-1953). Nuclear weapons move into the fore in later years, although their destructive power is reigned in a little for balance.

There's also a scenario editor, tweaks to the AI, and *HOI's* active fan community have directed a number of other improvements to balance. *Doomsday* is a great chance for you to catch up with a game that's improving with age.

PCZONE
81



...Simple graphical games is...

...The screenshots are shit.

COLD FEAR

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE www.focusmm.co.uk PRICE £4.99

COMING FROM DARKWORKS, who, with *Alone In The Dark* spawned the whole survival horror genre, *Cold Fear* is an atmospheric action-adventure set on a ghoulish Russian whaling ship caught in a bitter storm. The constantly-swaying ship and environmental effects are excellent, and the mutated creatures are suitably rotted and lurching, allowing you to execute some satisfyingly gory headshots and blood-spattering.

However, *Cold Fear* is severely hampered by a terrifically awkward

control system, random save points, poor object interaction and rather generic puzzle-solving gameplay. Keycards from dead sailors? Come on - this is 2006, not 1996. Not terrible, but you'd be better off saving your cash and ammo for the forthcoming PC release of the infinitely superior *Resident Evil 4*.

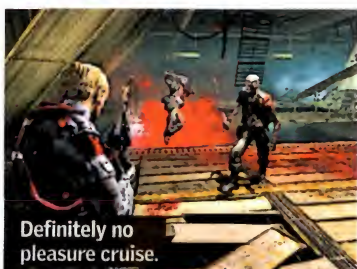
PCZONE
61



"Knew I should have worn my waterproofs."



Striplights always spell danger.



Definitely no pleasure cruise.

And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



WORMS FORTS: UNDER SIEGE
£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

This episode of the wriggling warriors added the ability to build towers, castles and citadels while simultaneously trying to destroy your opponent's stronghold. Yes, it's easy to learn and fun to play, but it's still limited in terms of strategy.

PCZONE
64



IMPERIAL GLORY
£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

A *Total War* clone that turned out really rather well. Set in the often overlooked Napoleonic era, it features some enjoyably complex sea battles, a heavy emphasis on diplomacy and fast-paced battles that demand quick-thinking leaders.

PCZONE
83



PLAYBOY: THE MANSION
£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

A cross between *The Sims* and *Lula 3D*, the emphasis here is on the creation of Heffner's empire, mainly involving an embarrassing, near-constant orgy of pixelated bumping and grinding.

PCZONE
54

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1

FAR CRY

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Glorious story-telling, engaging gameplay and the greenest lips in all of gaming-dom make the ever-overlooked *BG&E* a must-buy. Deep, imaginative, brilliant.



3

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

£9.99, BESTSELLER

Great melee, sneaky stealth and much lawless violence - not all console conversions are a pile of old poo.



4

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

£4.99, SOLD OUT

One of the finest strategy titles of recent years, *Soldiers* is a near-perfect blend of tactical thought, balls-out action and historical accuracy.



5

WARHAMMER 40K: DOW

£9.99, FOCUS

Even if you've never heard of the Games Workshop franchise, this *Command & Conquer*-style RTS is great-looking and explosive fun.

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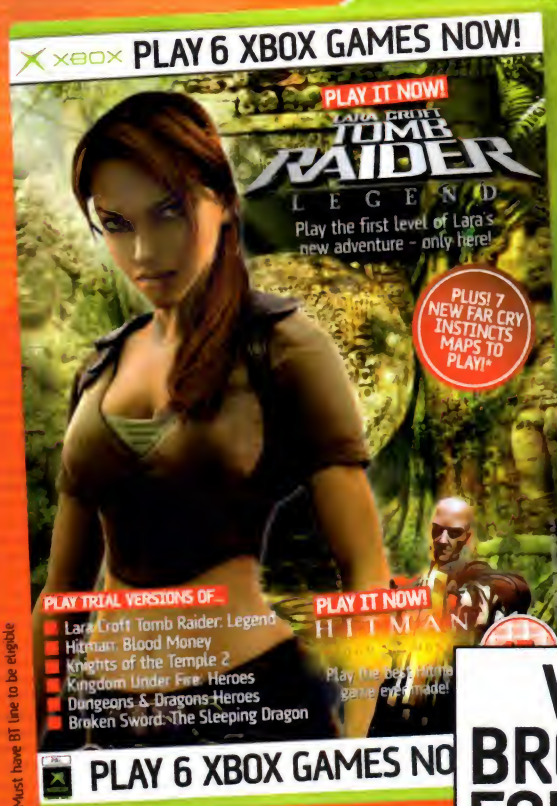
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XBOX 360
Launch line-up
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- ➔ Hitman: Blood Money

YOUR SHOUT!

Speak your brains on the latest releases



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES & WARRIOR WITHIN

OUR SCORES: 86% & 83%

Recently, I played through *POP: The Sands Of Time* and really enjoyed it – so much so that I went out and bought the other two *POP* games. However, having now played both of them, I disagree with the score of 86% you gave to *The Two Thrones* – you gave *Warrior Within* 83%, and it really should have been the other way round.

Warrior Within was a really good addition to *The Sands Of Time* and it added some great new features. These included the time portals, which allowed for loads of cool level design and puzzles – including the fast-moving Dahaka bits. I also liked the island, and the way levels added much-needed realism to the seemingly infinite palace of *The Sands Of Time*, and Babylon of *The Two Thrones*. On top of all this, *Warrior Within* is really well written with some clever set-pieces (for example, the Prince vs Wraith sequences) and plot twists.

On the other hand, *The Two Thrones* level design was drab and boring, the puzzles were all the same and the new features over-used – its only saving grace was the speed kill system. The Dark Prince was just a minor advancement from the Sand Wraith and wasn't really anything new as we were promised.

Mark Billy: **83% & 86%**

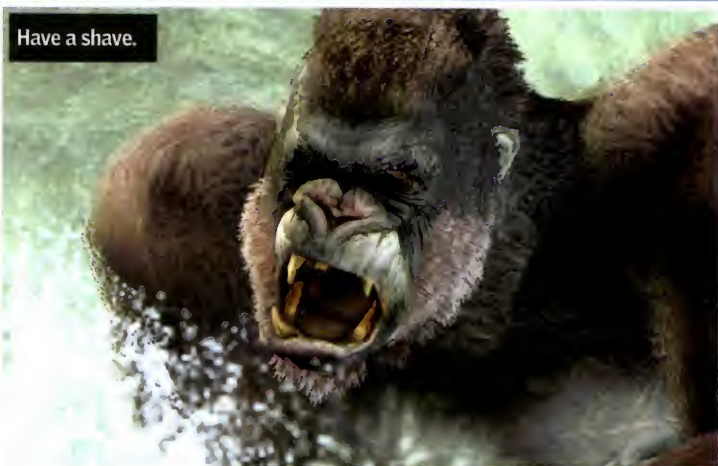
F.E.A.R.

OUR SCORE: 90%

Blowing someone's head off: it sounds like fun, and it is, until the 25th time when you get that weird feeling of déjà vu. The 'spectacular scenery': yes, it's technologically great, but it's rarely attractive and is repetitive. As for the

Review of the Month

Have a shave.



PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

OUR SCORE: 84%

I was really looking forward to playing the *King Kong* game, which I deliberately left until after I'd seen the Peter Jackson film. I wasn't disappointed. The first thing that really impressed is the graphics – even though the textures are somewhat consoley, the set-pieces involving the T-Rexes are truly astounding, heart-stopping affairs. Best prehistoric recreations in a videogame ever? The second element that elevates the game to classic status is the quality of the voice-acting and characterisation, with many of the film's stars, such as Jack Black, roped in to help. However, the third and most impressive bit is Kong himself – a hulking beast who controls intuitively and actually feels like a massive monkey when you're punching, jumping and leaping around Skull Island. This is easily the greatest movie-to-film game ever created – Michel Ancel should be congratulated and perhaps even given a British knighthood (even though he's French) for crafting an atmospheric, addictive and endlessly playable adventure. A super-monkey with balls.

Matthew Stevenson: **91%**

scares: often, you hear a loud, spine-chilling music cue, then a few pixels peep round a corner...

True, some of the scares are good, but they're in the demo, which has tighter level design, doesn't last long enough to become repetitive and is better than the game.

Richard Copperwaite: **79%**

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

OUR SCORE: 90%

I'm running like a coward, in dire need of new underpants, squad wiped out, bullets pinging around me. I keep running until



Can you feel the fear?

I've lost them. I stop, have a little wander about, then it hits me – I'm lost! This has never happened to me in a game before – even in *Far Cry* there's a pointer to the right direction. Rather than being annoying, this is awesome. I feel I'm in a living, breathing battlefield and I'm a soldier who's lost his way and his squad. It's moments like this that make *Flashpoint* stand out.

Adam Hart: **89%**



What a grey day.

YOU DO THE REVIEWS!

Agree? Disagree? Well, the world wouldn't be the wonderful place it was if we all thought the same way. If you fancy sharing your own thoughts with your fellow readers, then jot them down (we find the recent advancements in parchment and ink technology to be handy), trim the amount of words to a MAXIMUM of 100, add a score out of 100 then send them to the address below. If we think they're worthy of sharing, we'll print them here. Better yet, one of you each month will be awarded our coveted Review Of The Month award and showered with a gift of some description.

Send your reviews to: yourshout@pczone.co.uk, or stick them in an envelope and post them to: PC ZONE, Your Shout, Future, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW.

BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...



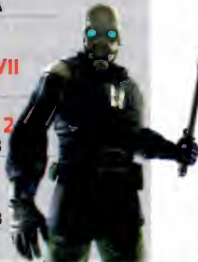
PCZONE TOP 5 MOST STUPID GAME NAMES IN ZONE'S REVIEW DATABASE

- 1 **FREDDY PHARKAS: FRONTIER PHARMACIST**
- 2 **WOODRUFF & THE SCHNIBBLE OF AZIMUTH**
- 3 **WET ATTACK: THE EMPIRE CUMS BACK**
- 4 **ZAPITALISM DELUXE**
- 5 **WHERE IN SPACE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?**



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES - JON BLYTH

- 1 **STUNT CAR RACER**
PCZ ISSUE: N/A
- 2 **DUNGEON MASTER**
PCZ ISSUE: N/A
- 3 **FINAL FANTASY VII**
PCZ ISSUE: 66
- 4 **HALF-LIFE 2**
PCZ ISSUE: 148
- 5 **ANARCHY ONLINE**
PCZ ISSUE: 148



PCZONE TOP 5 ELEVATOR MOMENTS

- 1 **FEAR**
- 2 **DOOM 3**
- 3 **HALF-LIFE**
- 4 **FINAL FANTASY VII**
- 5 **MAX PAYNE**



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2

PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



FAR CRY

PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outshines even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



CALL OF DUTY 2

PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgetting best.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

PCZ Issue: 138 - 91%

UT2004 packs so much punch, you'd be hard pushed to find a flaw. Team games, deathmatches, tactical thinking in the Onslaught mode - everything the sci-fi shoot 'em up fan could want.



F.E.A.R.

PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Scareghost* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



SWAT 4

PCZ Issue: 154 - 86%

SWAT 4 is a tactical squad shooter that sings. Dark in places, brutal in others, it's the only shooter that allows you to tazer old ladies and drown them in pepper spray. Probably the best co-op experience around to boot.

Strategy

Must buy!



ROME: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 148 - 93%

Once upon a time, all strategy games were visual abortions and strictly for the hardcore (OK, a bit of a sweeping statement). But *Rome: Total War* changed all that, mixing breathtaking 3D with troop numbers reminiscent of a Hollywood epic, as well as staggering historical accuracy. The result is a masterpiece and a game just about anyone can enjoy. Hell, how many other titles are made into TV shows?



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

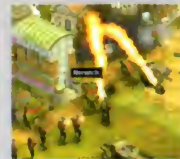
Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balin around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



RISE OF NATIONS

PCZ Issue: 129 - 90%

One of the best of the 'last generation' of Empire builders, *Rise of Nations* - coupled with exemplary expansion pack *Thrones and Patriots* - is a uniquely satisfying and addictive treatment of the Civ genre.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PCZ Issue: 149 - 88%

If you've got some downtime at the close of the day, then *Pirates!* is the most relaxing (and swashbuckling) game around. Drifting around the Caribbean with a flotilla of ships and mischief on your mind is escapism at its finest.



STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

PCZ Issue: 166 - 86%

A brilliant real-time tactical map and amazing space conflicts makes *Empire At War* the best *Star Wars* RTS ever. It's only let down by its land battles - otherwise, it's beyond reproach.



AGE OF EMPIRES III

PCZ Issue: 162 - 84%

A sprinkling of innovation and a barrelful of lushness lets us give this a hearty endorsement, even though it doesn't stray far from the established formula. Still the best 'new world' game, and the best RTS cannons ever.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

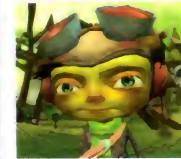
A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

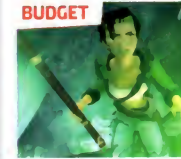
Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide, not that any of his outings can be considered bad games. *777* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time.

MMOs



Must buy!

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II

PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Sport



Must buy!

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
Football, football, football. Morning, noon and night. The beautiful game in a beautiful game. Not only the best version of *Pro Evo* ever, also the best footy game ever.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

PCZ Issue: 162 - 90%
One year on and the best footy management game is even better. Quick Tactics, half-time team talks, physio reports - changes are small but add up to a terrific whole.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Travel through time playing Tiger Woods throughout history. Only in an EA Sports game. *Tiger 06* is the best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



NHL 06

PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make EA Sports' incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.



MADDEN 2005

PCZ Issue: 152 - 84%
Although the 2006 version is now upon us, this is actually the better option (at least until 2007 arrives). In truth, there's little to differ between the versions, but this one just feels more fluid.

Simulation



Must buy!

X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%
No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yes there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



BUDGET

FREELANCER

PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0

PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its hard-working players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing



Must buy!

GT LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



GTR

PCZ Issue: 153 - 90%
As real as it gets. Probably. The complete driving solution on a PC, with all the drifting, hunting and racing you need. Invest in a decent force-feedback steering wheel and pedals set-up though.



LIVE FOR SPEED

PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%
If you're into cars, this is about as essential as petrol. With a massive collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

God games



Must buy!

THE MOVIES

PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2

PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



EVIL GENIUS

PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say 'No Mr Bond, I expect you to die', or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

May

AUTO ASSAULT
CITY LIFE
DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING
EVOLUTION GT
FACES OF WAR
FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS
GUILD WARS: FACTIONS
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE
HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY
PACIFIC STORM
RESIDENT EVIL 4
RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
RUSH FOR BERLIN
THE DA VINCI CODE
TIMESHIFT
TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND
TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY
WAR ON TERROR

June

COMPANY OF HEROES
DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT & MAGIC
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE
RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR
SENSIBLE SOCCER
SILENT HUNTER 4
STRONGHOLD: LEGENDS
TITAN QUEST

NCISOFT
DEEP SILVER
UBISOFT
BLACK BEAN
UBISOFT
THQ
NCISOFT
VALVE
UBISOFT
EIDOS
BUKA
UBISOFT
MICROSOFT
DEEP SILVER
2K GAMES
ATARI
KOCH MEDIA
KOCH MEDIA
DEEP SILVER

THQ
UBISOFT
ATARI
PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE
MIDWAY
CODEMASTERS
UBISOFT
2K GAMES
THQ

"In terms of pure,
unadulterated fear,
Condemned is practically
beyond reproach."

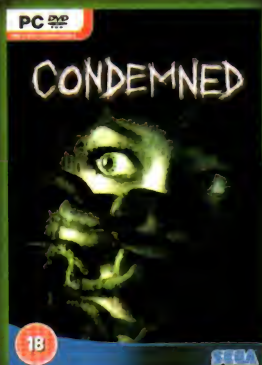
Official Xbox 360

CONDEMNED

You are FBI Agent Ethan Thomas. To hunt the
world's most dangerous serial killer you'll need
to keep your eyes open. Starting now.

OUT FOR PC 7th April

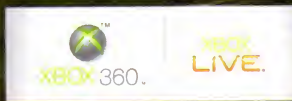
FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE TO WWW.CONDEMNEDTHEGAME.COM



ask
about
games
.com



Also available on



SEGA
www.sega.co.uk

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PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

HARDWARE EDITOR Phil Wand

Dell deals

SO DELL WENT AND bought Alienware. And although the former explained that its deal with the latter was "to signal a commitment to high-performance computing", there are many more obvious things the world's number one should be doing to signal its commitment.

First, it can put Athlons in its machines. How hard can this be? Second, it can ditch the Indian call centres. I have no idea what they're saying, my friends and family have no idea what they're saying, and I'd wager that even they have no idea what they're saying. Now that Dell owns Alienware, its supply chain will allow Alienware systems to be made cheaper, quicker and in greater numbers, meaning it's only a matter of time before support costs increase and the support department moves to the subcontinent. Can't wait.

It might also be a good idea to quit bamboozling people with cut-price bargains and free flat-screen monitors. The Dimension is its best-selling desktop, yet the entry-level models you find landing on your doormat every week can't easily be upgraded. Don't buy them.

Dell has also been tweaking and polishing its own gaming range in recent months, culminating in the launch of the world's first quad-SLI rig with the world's worst paint-job. Despite costing almost \$10,000, the XPS Renegade sold out in three days, and the company now claims that its enthusiast-oriented XPS business by itself is larger than Alienware.

You have to ask, why?

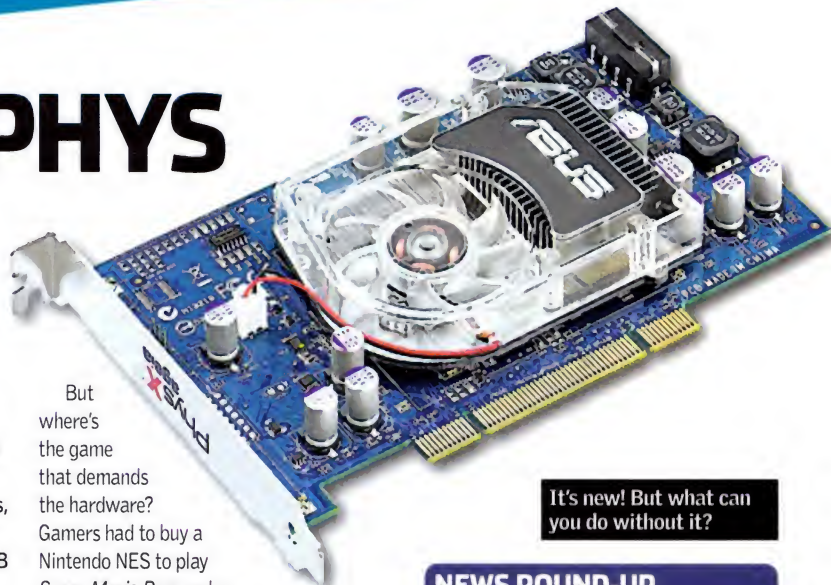
BUCKS PHYS

Dedicated physics hardware soon, but where are the dedicated games?

AGEIA TECHNOLOGIES, THE COMPANY behind the PhysX processor, is getting rather excited about its dedicated physics hardware. Press releases have been arriving with an ever-increasing oftenness, and now that ASUS has joined BFG Technologies in announcing that its 256MB PhysX card will be in stores by June, things have reached a state of fervour.

We know over 60 developers are planning and creating more than 100 games to take advantage of hardware-accelerated physics, and that system builders such as Alienware will allow customers to configure their systems with PhysX processors. We know that AGEIA is touting its creation as something that will become "as important to games as graphics cards", and that real-time physical motion and interaction could indeed change the way we play games forever.

But where's the game that demands the hardware? Gamers had to buy a Nintendo NES to play *Super Mario Bros* and a Sony PlayStation to play *Tekken* or *Gran Turismo*. But gamers will not be required to buy AGEIA products to play *Unreal Tournament 2007*, because the PhysX hardware is an added bonus rather than a prerequisite. And while it could be argued that the same was true of the first video accelerators – you didn't need a 3dfx card to play *Quake* – the physics processor is an addition of little relevance to most gamers. Because, tragically, most gamers play *The Sims*. uk.asus.com



It's new! But what can you do without it?

NEWS ROUND-UP

As noted last month, Windows Vista is likely to demand a minimum specification to make many people's eyes water – 512MB RAM plus an up-to-date processor and video card. To help buyers determine which PCs make the grade, Microsoft has developed a 'Vista Ready' program of sticky labels. The only problem is, the program apparently grades performance based on the Home Basic edition – the least desirable version lacking all the visual gimcrackery of the new Windows UI. Vista won't be here until next year anyway, which means it's all a bit academic anyway. microsoft.com

Those nice fellows at bit-tech.net ran a feature comparing a range of video cards running *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. Despite the fact that the results are wholly alarming – even the baddest-ass card on sale limped along at 15fps in places – the sheer beauty of *Oblivion* in HDR at 1280x1024 gives us hardware freaks something to aim for. Thank heavens for punishing games! bit-tech.net

PLUG LOVELY

Now ear this

A NEW TYPE OF earbud from Koss is designed to change shape as you wear it, giving heightened isolation from external sounds. Heralded as the first of its type, the Koss Plug features a soft, expandable cushion which provides a custom-fit and a claimed frequency response performance of 10-20,000Hz.

Although designed primarily for portable sound systems – it's also available in white – the way the Plug seals off the outside



Hydrophilic, formed urethane tips ensure the perfect fit.

world makes it ideal for gamers wishing to lose themselves in the action. Koss claim that the Plug is able to deliver audio quality which rivals that of more expensive, closed-style headphones. koss.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY



ALIENWARE: Shiny jumpsuits made of tinfoil, upside-down fishbowls, rubber gloves and anal probes, that sort of thing. **XTREME 64:** When you're counting upwards from 60 and you shout the number 64 really loudly. **XPS RENEGADE:** An Ex-Police Squad renegade: a rebel, a loose cannon, you're off the force, hand in your badge, that sort of thing. **PCI:** Police Constable Investigator, this is what Magnum PI would have been had his career guidance form been misprinted... In England. **MEGA SKY:** Patches of sky recently discovered over the North Atlantic ocean which are roughly three times bigger than regular bits of sky. **BFG TECHNOLOGY:** Dream-catching ear trumpets and special jar devices for trapping nightmares, that sort of thing.



Wandy's so impressed, he might even buy one.

SPECIFICATION

Processor AMD Athlon 64 X2 4800+ Screen 17-inch 1680x1050 X-Glass Wireless Integrated 802.11g/b Graphics 1 GeForce Go 7800 GTX RAM 1GB PC3200 (expandable to 2GB) HDD 1 Hitachi Travelstar 100GB HDD 2 Hitachi Travelstar 100GB Optical 1 8x DVD Dual Layer (+/-) Sound 7.1 surround output OS Windows XP Home Warranty 3-year collect and return

XTREME 64 4800+

PRICE £2,231 MANUFACTURER rockdirect WEBSITE rockdirect.com

ALTHOUGH I'M QUIZZED regularly about my chosen memory brand, my favourite motherboard and whether I like Athlons or Pentiums, Radeons or GeForces, breasts or bottoms, the question I'm asked most often is whether my next machine will be a laptop.

Three years ago, when laptops had tiny screens and huge prices, and were bought solely by hair-moussed poseurs to use on trains, I scoffed at the idea of even using one. They were toys for people who would bore you with spreadsheets or the novel they were working on. They had toothless processors and crummy video cards, and yet were more expensive than a new bathroom. I would sooner have bought a 24-carat Care Bears lunchbox than wasted my money on one, but last year my scoffing turned into second thoughts, and this year I'm certain. Laptops are where it's at.

I would be a lot less certain if not for machines such as rockdirect's Xtreme 64.

It crams a high-end Athlon 64 X2 processor, GeForce Go 7800 GTX, 1GB RAM, two 100GB hard drives, a dual-format DVD writer, 7.1 surround sound, 17-inch X-Glass screen, plus a proper-size keyboard and separate numeric pad into a foldaway computer measuring just 40x30cm. While this combination of hardware might seem a little excessive (and that's before you count the number of fans required to keep it all from boiling over), the Xtreme delivers performance which equals or betters the overwhelming majority of desktops.

NOT PRETTY

Anyone who lifted the lid on the rockdirect came away wanting it, and although it's heavier and uglier than a blacksmith's anvil, you can still do all the usual laptop stuff with it. Just don't expect the battery to last more than 15 minutes while you're using it in bed.

No, I know it doesn't make much sense if all you're looking to do is answer the odd email and look at pie charts. But the Xtreme

is so unbelievably good at doing its job – playing games, any games – that you can shrug off all its shortcomings. The front lip on the case is abrupt and uncomfortable. The rubber grommets which cover various interfaces are missing lanyards, so you'll lose them within a week. The huddling together of the four USB ports leaves no room for pen drives. I also never quite got to grips with the touchpad, which seemed even more annoying than most others I've used. But that's about it.

If you have the money and an inclination, there are two things you need to consider. The first is that, for £300 more, you can have your Xtreme 64 fitted with an FX-60. The second is that, for almost the same money, you could go for the Xtreme SL instead. The SL is a slimmer, neater design and features a Turion 64 processor, with two GeForce Go 7800 GTX cards in SLI configuration and a whopping great 19-inch X-Glass screen. Yes, my next machine will be a laptop. **PC7**



iMON 2.4G LT

PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER SoundGraph
WEBSITE quietpc.com

iMON IS A multi-function controller which promises to turn your XP machine into a Home Theatre PC. The version seen here talks to a USB RF receiver connected to your PC, and the beauty is that, unlike infrared, RF doesn't need line-of-sight and will work up to 30 metres away.

And work it does. The iMon manager not only allows you to work Windows from afar, but also adds functionality such as a sleep-timer – if you have your PC in your bedroom, it's something you'd use every night. The iMedian suite gives you a remote-friendly interface to your music, movies and photographs, and will even stream radio stations from the Web.

The only difference between the LT and the more expensive DT version is that the latter uses a PCI-based receiver and is able to switch the machine on and off. If you can live without that, the LT will save you £15.



PCZONE

VALUE • PERFORMANCE

82

SP-HF 1250X

PRICE £47 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.co.uk

THE SP-HF 1250XS ARE substantial two-way monitor speakers styled on the ones your dad bought before he married your mum. Each unit is 335mm tall, putting it level with many LCD screens – if you're going to have both of them on your desktop, and my advice would be to keep them level with your head and about three feet apart, you're going to need a lot of space.

Despite the low price, the overall quality is pleasingly high. Each speaker is hewn from 12mm MDF, weighs almost 1Kg and sounds noticeably brighter and punchier than the similarly retro £70 GIGAWORKS T20 2.0 (issue 167, 70%). One of

the pair connects directly to the mains – no transformer needed – and takes its input from any stereo sound source. The front panel features a power switch, volume, treble and bass controls, plus aux in and headphones socket. They crank up clean and loud and I really liked them.



PCZONE

VALUE • PERFORMANCE

86

MEGA SKY 580

PRICE £31
MANUFACTURER MSI
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

THE AWESOMELY-NAMED Mega Sky 580 is a DVB-T USB receiver which displays, records and timeshifts digital TV and radio. You can either plug in the supplied antenna, which isn't much cop, or you can connect your home aerial to the receiver using the supplied converter. Installation takes under five minutes, and I can only laugh when I look back at all the hours I've wasted mucking about with lesser products: the Mega Sky does everything its older, bulkier, more expensive rivals do.

The software you get with the Mega Sky 580 looks and feels like it was made by people who never watch TV, and that's typical of this genre. Another complaint is that the supplied remote control is infrared – unless you connect the receiver to a USB port on the front of your PC and have clear sight to it, it doesn't work. Niggles aside, it's simple, easy and it works.



PCZONE

VALUE • PERFORMANCE

92

NH-U12

PRICE £40
MANUFACTURER Noctua
WEBSITE quietpc.com

I'LL KICK THINGS off with a look at what's bad about Noctua's NH-U12 cooler. The manual's a bit small. Now that's over and done with, we'll look at what's good about it.

The first thing is that it's a rather conspicuous design. Standing 150mm tall, it looks striking inside any case – you can't ignore four dual-heat pipes curling elegantly into 5,000 square centimetres of finned aluminium. The second thing is that it comes supplied with a range of brackets to suit the full range of Intel 478/775 and AMD 754/939/940 processors.

The most important thing to say about the NH-U12 is that it's extremely good at getting rid of heat. With a single 120mm fan



held against the metal blades with spring clips and noise-dampening tape – QuietPC recommend the £19 120mm AcoustiFan DustPROOF – your system will run significantly cooler and quieter. Which is what you bought it for, right?

PCZONE

VALUE • PERFORMANCE

90

HOW TO...

BUY YOUR HARDWARE ONLINE

Need:

Money

Time:

Indefinite

Difficulty level:

Phil Wand

HAL 9000

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

James Saltman

Most people buy their hardware online these days.
Phil Wand turns you into an Internet shopping smartypants

ICAN STILL remember registering a copy of Zipit for my Macintosh in September 1995. It was my first purchase online, and I was expecting to have my card details stolen and my next statement to detail a spending spree worthy of any lottery winner. I would then have to spend the rest of my life telling a customer services representative from MasterCard that I'd not bought two dozen TVs from a store in Urbana, Illinois, and that although it was my dream to holiday in Nassau, I'd not been there. Certainly not twice.

Of course, all this never happened. And while MasterCard would have been aghast back then had they known I was copying and pasting my card details into boxes on random Web pages, the company now expects people to do just that, such is the level of spending online. You've probably bought all manner of gear over the Net, but do you really know what you're doing? Read on to find out...



Full information on the **Consumer Credit Act 1974**, **Distance Selling Regulations 2000** and **E-commerce Regulations 2002** can be found at dti.gov.uk, and although they're not bedtime reading, you should acquaint yourself with their summaries. Almost as exciting is the **Sale and Supply Of Goods To Consumers Regulations 2002**, which means the seller bears all risks until you take delivery – in the event of a dispute, the burden of proof is on the seller rather than on you to prove an item's condition. A **comparison shopping site** collects data from all the product's available Web retailers and allows you to pick out the best deals: sites such as **Froogle** and **NexTag** allow you to order the products by price, thus giving you the **cheapest buys**.

01 Making your mind up

There's an almost limitless range of crap available online and a huge temptation to buy things you don't want. If you're set on buying the 19-inch NEC flat-screen from our Buyer's Guide, don't be distracted by a bargain-priced 21-inch product from a manufacturer you've never heard of. Make a shopping list and stick to it. Most retailers will tempt you with special offers, so unless you actually need that keyboard duster, tartan mouse jacket and USB cigar lighter, don't put them in your basket. Shopping online is about saving money, not wasting it.



WARNING: THINK TWICE ABOUT EBAY

Seen a bargain on eBay? Although eBay provides a low level of protection against fraud, it only covers you for a small amount and only in very specific circumstances – there's no such thing as a money-back guarantee. Why? The auction company cleverly describes itself as a 'venue', meaning it avoids all of the complex laws relating to auctioneering. That means it does not participate, verify or offer assurances on any item sold – it just rakes in the money at the astonishing rate of \$5bn annually. So you're on your own.

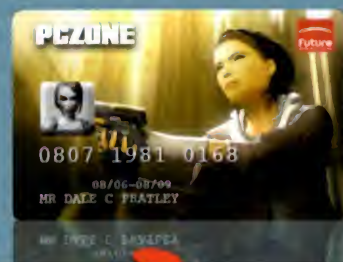
02 Shop around

Except when you have good reason to, don't get tied to one particular vendor. Use a comparison shopping site such as froogle.google.co.uk, uk.nextag.com or shopping.kelkoo.co.uk to find the best deals. Remember that some vendors are artful with VAT, so remember to multiply the price by 1.175 if it doesn't include tax – it can make a big difference. If you're buying multiple items, work out the total delivered cost of all purchases and see if it makes sense to buy them from one retailer and save on shipping.



03 Always use a credit card

Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 means that, for purchases with a cash price above £100 and not more than £30,000, you're entitled to claim from the lender if your purchase goes pear-shaped. This means that if the retailer fails to honour the contract, sells you a faulty item, wrongly describes it or goes bust, you can get your money back from the card company. You are not covered by Section 75 if you use a debit or charge card.



04 Final considerations

Look for contact details on the retailer's website. Vendors such as Chillblast and Overclockers display a telephone number and business address prominently, and it's reassuring to know you can get hold of them in the event of difficulty. If you're looking for next-day or Saturday delivery, look for surcharges and the cut-off time for placing your order. Vendors such as CPC offer free shipping if you spend over a certain amount, but remember that many retailers will only ship to the credit card holder's registered address.



05 Afterwards: know your rights

When you shop online, the Distance Selling Regulations 2000 give you additional rights which you wouldn't have if you were to shop in town. You have a cooling-off period of seven days in which to make up your mind about a purchase you've made on the Web. If you decide you don't want it, you can send it back for a refund – so make sure you open all packaging carefully and keep it safe. Note that the Distance Selling Regulations do not apply if you bought the goods in an online auction such as eBay.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Got something you want to ask? Just want something else to read? Either way, this little box will make you happy...

- ☒ Can I return software I don't want?
☒ No. The Distance Selling Regulations cooling-off period does not apply to software where the box has been unsealed.
- ☒ What's an OEM product?
☒ It's short for Original Equipment Manufacturer, and means the item is likely to be noticeably cheaper but will be supplied on its own in a bubble-wrap bag without cables, manuals or software.
- ☒ Who do I contact in the event of difficulty?
☒ Initially, the retailer. If they're no help, contact your credit card company and tell them. You can always contact Trading Standards for guidance.
- ☒ Where do you shop?
☒ Insight, CPC and John Lewis. Don't laugh: John Lewis provides the best customer service anywhere, plus free shipping for items over £100.



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Up to your neck in debt? Partner sleeping around? A propensity to wake up on Saturday morning with a kebab and beer can stuck to your face? We can't help with any of those (but if you know the answers, let us know), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information as necessary and system specs where applicable.

The only way to format a drive: just £12.99 from Screwfix. Probably.



DRIVER WATCH
Keep your PC happy

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 6.3	08 MAR 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 81.98	07 FEB 06

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	SOUND BLASTER	
X-FI 2.070004		15 NOV 05
Creative	AUDIGY, AUDIGY 2, AUDIGY 4 2.080004	24 JAN 06

FORMAT CAPACITY

Q I've made a massive mistake, one that I never thought I'd make. I have an XP multi-boot system with Windows on two disks. I wanted to reinstall on one of the drives, so I booted from the Microsoft CD and selected the destination. From there, I removed the existing partition, leaving only unpartitioned space. I then created a new partition using the Quick Format option, and realised that I'd actually nuked the partition on the wrong disk. This is the worst thing I could have done as all my important documents – letters, accounts, you name it – have disappeared. Is there any way to retrieve this data or salvage this situation? Please, please, please: tell me there's something I can do? I know that when a file is deleted it actually stays on the disk until it's overwritten, and I don't think a Quick Format overwrites anything – or does it? I feel sick. Please help.

Chris Darby

A Readers with nervous disorders and/or a heart condition will be glad to know that I responded to Chris soon after his cry for help turned up.

Here's what I said: this is a pickle for which you will need a third-party utility. We've all done this at one time or another, so don't beat yourself up about it. My recommendation would be Acronis Disk Director Suite 10.0. If you look at www.acronis.com, one of Disk Director's many features is the ability to recover deleted partitions.

He later came back to me: Thanks for the help, problem sorted. Amazing bit of software too. Got back all the necessary files, even Outlook's .PST file so I didn't lose the contacts or any messages from my inbox. Now maybe I can get on and do what it was I wanted to do in the first place! Thanks again.

The reason Chris was able to recover his files was because Windows setup performs what's known as 'high-level' formatting. Neither the Full nor the Quick Format options destroy any data on the disk the way most people think they do. They simply rewrite the file allocation tables – in essence, the drive's index – so that the files and folders are no longer accessible by the

operating system (the Quick Format option omits a scan for bad sectors and hence is much quicker). Your stuff will remain on the drive in either case, but Windows won't be able to take you to it.

The only way to destroy your data so the feds can't get you is to write new data all over the disk. This takes hours to complete, even on a 40GB drive, and would require either a specialist utility (see dban.sourceforge.net) or specialist knowledge – and even then, deletion isn't 100% guaranteed. The only secure way to destroy data is to physically destroy the drive.

DANGERMUSE

Q Could you please tell me why my mouse pointer keeps flitting to one corner or another?

Bill Fryer

A As with most computer problems, there's more than one thing which might cause this behaviour. If it's an optical mouse, you need to make sure that the lens underneath your rodent is clean and free from dust, hair and fragments of digestive biscuits. An optical clicker works by shining a bright LED at whatever surface it's sitting on and picking up reflections from it with a sensor. It compares a whole sequence of reflections to calculate in which direction the mouse is travelling – if the reflections are distorted by yesterday's dinner, the movements will be distorted also.

The second thing to check is that your pad isn't confusing your mouse, and that you're not using it directly on the desk, as highly polished surfaces can send confusing signals. You also need to find another mouse – ball or optical, the choice is yours – in order to test that the symptoms occur only when one particular device is plugged in. It could be simply that your mouse is faulty.

The last thing involves removing your existing mouse driver and reinstalling it. Your best bet here is to Google for KB321122, which will take you to a Knowledge Base article on Microsoft's site with guidance on how to do this.

INSTANT FREEZE FRAME

I've just purchased an ASUS X850XT card to replace my old 9600 XT. However, there seems to be no improvement in performance when playing *GT Legends*. At times the machine pauses, and now it's much worse than before. Must I always have this game on low settings? The 9600 XT was working well, but I wanted more – and I thought that this was the best AGP card to have. Have I wasted my money? Is it a faulty card? I have an Athlon 3200+ on an A7N8X Deluxe with 1.5GB RAM and a 350W PSU. Could power be the problem?

Wayne Humble

A It could be your power supply, but I don't know what other power-hungry



@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

I don't think a Quick Format overwrites anything – or does it? I feel quite sick. Please help...

Faster than a speeding bullet, cue Wandy to Chris Darby's rescue...



Most bangor for your buckage.

devices you have on your system, and in any case, I would also expect more drastic symptoms. It could be that your A7N8X could do with some newer nForce drivers, so my first stop would be the NVIDIA website. It could also be that you're using the software that came on the CD-ROM rather than a fresh download from the ATI website.

Even more likely is that StarForce, the irritating copy protection system that installs silently with GT Legends, is causing your system to stutter. StarForce titles install a hidden device driver which has been reported to cause a number of issues. I'd suggest you either update it at star-force.com or get rid of it entirely.

Quite often, StarForce is not removed when you uninstall the game, so download the StarForce Removal Tool from onlinesecurity-on.com. For the record, because no copy protection system is certified as foolproof, they're all utterly pointless. All it needs is one guy in Russia to get around the security measures and the Internet will do the rest.

In my opinion, people are buying fewer games because the games are overpriced and underwhelming. Publishers need to address this issue before wailing about piracy.

WELL CONNECTED

Q I've decided it's time to upgrade my system and would like your advice. I'm not on a strict budget, but want the best bang for my buck. I'd therefore be grateful to you if you could let me know what you reckon would be my optimum choice for a graphics card. I have to buy a motherboard and everything else, but want to get the graphics card first and build around it. I'm happy to spend £200.

Barry Martin

A After a recent price chop, the Connect3D Radeon X1800 XT can be had for around £200. That's what I'd buy if I was shopping.

ALBUM ART

Q Can you tell me where the album image files are stored which are used by Windows Media Player 10? I have some which don't match the particular album and would like to change them to a different picture. I have tried the edit option which gives me a Picture tab, but need to know where to find the images. I hope you can help.

Craig Terry

A The album images you already have will be scattered throughout your

music folders and will have names like AlbumArt_OD21800217.jpg. The easiest way to add your own is to make sure your music is grouped by artist or album into individual folders, then Google Images search for a JPEG

picture of the album in question, or perhaps a flattering portrait of the artist. Save it to the appropriate directory with the filename Folder.jpg and hey presto, the picture will appear in Windows Media Player.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



10 WINDOWS DEFENDER

EXPECT TO PAY Free
microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware
Definitions of 'spyware' vary. The author of a spyware program which collects personal information will tell you that, because users press OK and consent to installing his software, it can hardly be considered sneaky.

Of course, many users have no idea what they're consenting to. My mother would install a Drive Wipe Buddy if the question was worded right. "But dear, this box appeared saying it would improve the format of my hard drive," she would say. "And it came with this big purple squirrel which sat on my desktop. I'd have preferred a hamster."

My definition of spyware is a little different. I call it piggyware, in the sense that it often gains

access to your PC by riding piggyback with another program's setup program. As an example, I would never dream of installing Yahoo! Toolbar, nor do I want GameSpy Arcade, because they're rubbish. Yet despite that, these programs regularly attempt to sneak onto my system! The best advice is to always select Custom Setup in the installation program. Be very careful when stepping through, and don't click the Next button without reading the screen it applies to.

Sadly, Windows Defender won't remove piggyware like GameSpy Arcade, but it will keep help you keep your system clean of more nasties which cause pop-up ads, slow-downs and crashes. It's free to anyone with a validated copy of Windows, so why spend money on anything else?

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

Q: Is buying a faster SATA II drive a waste of time? Is there a difference from SATA I? **A:** SATA II is the interface, not the drive. The drives are the same units we've had for years, with the same restrictions. They're electro-mechanical devices which in singular form never get close to the limits of the ports into which they're plugged. Most drives struggle to top 70MB/sec, whereas the SATA II interface handles 3GB/sec. That said, multiple SATA I/II drives in RAID configuration allow you to transfer data quicker. But there's no difference between a single 250GB SATA II drive and a single 250GB ATA-100 drive.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Pleased remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

WATCHDOG

Not all companies are bad – but if they are, write to us for help...

BOONTY HUNTER

A big WWII plane sim enthusiast, Chris Reed couldn't stop himself from purchasing *IL2: Sturmovik – Forgotten Battles* from online game delivery site BoontyGames.com for a mere £10. Chris enjoyed the game for a few months, then uninstalled it and forgot about it.

A few months later, Chris decided to start flying again, but when he tried to activate the game over the Internet, he got a blank page. When he contacted Boonty Games, they informed him that the game had been offered as a promotional partnership between them and Yahoo – but now that partnership had ended, hence the non-existent website. Boonty soon got on the case though and sorted Chris out with a working code.

A few months down the line and Chris needed to re-format his machine, which meant he needed yet another code. A bit



wasn't doing his computer any favours, he soon tracked the noise down to the chip fan. Obviously a bit worried, he got online straight away and sent Asus a querying email. In reply, they stated that they'd send him out a replacement, but two months later and despite quite a few chasing emails, no replacement had arrived. To make matters worse, by now the fan had died and Aron was rightfully left wondering just where his fan could have got to.

Asus were anything but tardy in their reply to us. The same day that we made contact

with them, they replied: "Our office in Hemel Hempstead was badly damaged from the oil depot explosion in December 2005. As a result of this, a lot of our computer equipment and component parts, including emails, were lost. The technical service department has tried their best since then to recover as many emails as possible and tried to fulfil any customer requests. I have just been informed by our technical service manager that they have contacted Mr Veres and a replacement fan will be sent out this evening to him." Success all round this month. **W4**

To make matters worse, by now the fan had died, and Aron was left wondering where his replacement was

annoyed by now, Chris sent an email to Boonty but also asked if he could get a new code so that he didn't have to call up every time. Boonty didn't reply.

We got in contact with Boonty.com: "Boonty tries to protect the intellectual rights and the work of game publishers, while ensuring the best experience for customers. Our DRM system (Digital Rights Management) allows the customer to re-install the game on the same computer, but does not allow re-installation on any other computer without our intervention. The End-User License Agreement this customer accepted stipulates this precisely. Boonty understands this is quite complicated, but the systems are here to reduce piracy."

Finally, Boonty apologised for the bad response time: "As this situation is not acceptable, we'd be glad to offer this customer the outstanding add-on of his *IL2: Forgotten Battles* as compensation". Makes you feel all warm inside doesn't it?

ON THE BLOWER

Back in December, Aron Veres' tasty ASUS SLI motherboard started to make an awful whining noise. Fearful that it

THE ACCUSED

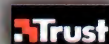


ASUS

Guilty until proven innocent



SAINTS NOT SINNERS....



No nominations for a while, then two in a month for Saints Not Sinners. First up, Thomas Harney was especially impressed with the customer service at Trust. Under orders from his wife, he was recently swapping his computer desk for a newer one when he accidentally broke one of the stands for his satellite speakers. Fully expecting to have to pay out for a new stand, Thomas got in touch with Trust's customer services but was pleasantly surprised when they told him they'd order the part in from one of their warehouses and send it on free of charge directly from Holland. In Trust we trust.



Meanwhile, Chris Collins had been using his Logitech cordless mouse and keyboard for 18 months with no problems when something went kaput with the mouse, making the batteries discharge rather than charge. After trying a few things, Chris got back in touch with Logitech who finally diagnosed the problem as a faulty docking station, and told him they'd send out a replacement. They then discovered that the part was out of stock and so instead of trying to wiggle out of the whole deal, sent out a brand new mouse complete with docking station free of charge instead. Bravo, Logitech.

**Mrs Mitchell cut the school run
in half with her Callisto GXR SE**



Auto Assault

EU.AUTORASSAULT.COM

THE END OF THE ROAD AS YOU KNOW IT



NCsoft



NETDEVIL



COMING 13 APRIL 2006



www.pegi.info

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REMEMBER:
YOU ALSO NEED
MONEY FOR FOOD
AND CLOTHING

We are legally required to remind readers that money splashed on hardware may be better spent on families, wives and girlfriends. PC ZONE isn't liable for any estrangement that may ensue.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

It's time to fire up the World Wide Web and shop like a footballer's wife...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

X1900 XTX

EXPECT TO PAY £371

MANUFACTURER CONNECT3D

WEBSITE www.connect3d.com

Like its GeForce 7800 GTX predecessor, our current video card champ is a reference card. It's also the fastest single device available, putting most dual-card configurations in the shade. We've chosen the Connect3D variant as it's a no-nonsense package for sensible money, making it an ideal grounding for CrossFire rigs.

PROCESSOR



ATHLON 64 FX-60

EXPECT TO PAY

£740

MANUFACTURER

AMD

WEBSITE amd.com

Running at 2.6GHz, the Athlon 64 FX-60 actually clocks slightly slower than its predecessor, the FX-57, but runs dual-cores each with a 128KB L1 cache. In essence, it's seriously bloody fast. If you're looking to build an overclocked colossus which smokes 99% of other systems out there, look no further.

MOTHERBOARD



FATALITY AN8 SLI

EXPECT TO PAY

£125

MANUFACTURER

ABIT

WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Designed specifically for gaming, the nForce4 SLI-based Fatal1ty AN8 supports all 939-pin AMD processors. As well as SLI support it features ABIT's Guru Panel, a front-mounted display unit for overclockers. The board also uses a bevy of ABIT features, including OTES cooling and AudioMAX 7.1 onboard audio.

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY

£190

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



MULTISYNC LCD1970GX

EXPECT TO PAY

£311

MANUFACTURER

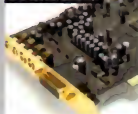
NEC Mitsubishi

WEBSITE

www.nec-display-solutions.co.uk

The LCD1970GX is a 19in LCD screen, with an 8ms response time and an inky black glass screen that saturates all the colours and darkens the shadows. It includes a joystick controller for the on-screen display, and a four-port USB hub.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY

£129

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still painfully pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY

£188

MANUFACTURER

Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

They'll cost you over £200, but they're also the best speakers we've ever tested at PC ZONE. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

X800 GTO

EXPECT TO PAY £110

MANUFACTURER GECUBE

WEBSITE gecube.com.tw

You could save yourself a tenner and go for the 8-pipeline GT, but you'd be missing out. The GTO is without doubt the mainstream card to go for: an overclocking dream, it can trump the 6800 GT on maximum detail and this GECUBE comes with a heat-pipe and sensible bundle.

PROCESSOR



ATHLON 64 3000+

EXPECT TO PAY

£88

MANUFACTURER

AMD

WEBSITE www.amd.co.uk

If you don't mind getting your hands dirty in the BIOS, Athlon 64s can be highly rewarding – particularly so on an nForce4 motherboard. Famous for overclocking and top performance in games, there's really no alternative. This AMD chip is the one to have if you're building to a budget.

MOTHERBOARD



A8N-E NFORCE4 ULTRA

EXPECT TO PAY £55

MANUFACTURER

ASUSTek

WEBSITE uk.asus.com

The A8N-E supports the full range of Athlon 64 FX, dual-core Athlon 64 X2 and Athlon 64 chips, plus PCI Express and 7.1 channel audio. The nForce4 Ultra chipset has more features than a circus has clowns, and ASUS includes a raft of its own, as well as some serious overclocking tools.

HDD



1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY

£48

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY

£159

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710s is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time and 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

£32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY

£39

MANUFACTURER

Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

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FRACTIONS[™]

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GAMING
REVOLUTION
CONTINUES...

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ONLINE GAMING, WITH NO FEES*



NCsoft



ARENET

PC CD-ROM

12+

www.pegi.info

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New ways to
discover the best new games
read all the latest gossip

see the
score
learn
chat
get so
win
save money



New issue

OUT NOW





PCZONE

FREEPLAY

Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

STAFF WRITER Steve Hogarty

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

FREE
GAMES!

Blind kittens

E VERYWHERE I GO, people always stop me and say: "Hey, you're that guy aren't you? The man what gives out free stuff? Give me something for free will you?" To which I reply: "What? If I give you something for free, you'll just sell it to purchase mind-altering medication or alcoholic beverages. Instead, I will throw my expensive shoes up in this tree. If you climb the tree and retrieve my shoes, you'll learn an important lesson about perseverance and self-development. Now go homeless man, get my shoes."

That man is now a senior manager in over two successful fast food restaurants. He realises now that it wasn't the shoes which I'd given him for free (as I've since asked for them to be returned), but I'd actually given him the key to unlock the Potential Within Himself. And that's precious and fragile like a newborn kitten, all wrinkly and blind, or the pretentious ramblings of somebody who's been given his own column. This month, Freeplay is all about self-improvement, especially *Cannon Cat* and *Super Secret Ninja*, both of which carry important life lessons. So be prepared to experience a new, better you...

Try this!

Parlez-vous Francais?



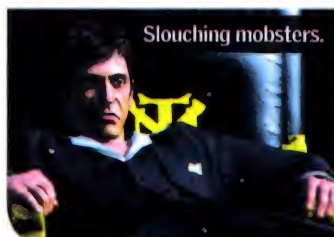
In *Star Wars: Empire At War*, the alien text on one of the menu screens supposedly translates to: 'At Petroglyph we are dedicated to making top quality games that are extremely fun and innovative.' We can't verify this though, seeing as we're not great fat nerds.



Angry hobos.

112 Demo Pages

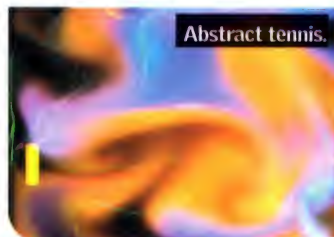
Get your free games here!



Slouching mobsters.

114 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



Abstract tennis.

118 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



Show-offs.

120 Play!

Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



Boats and quests.

126 Be the bee's knees in D&D

Dragons? Dungeons? Bring it!



Alien chums.

129 How To Make A Game

Dan Marshall bids adieu



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS



178.3
HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



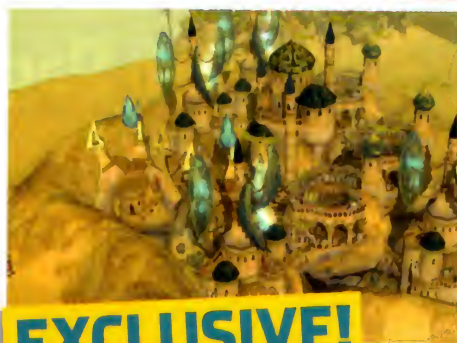
Demos

On the DVD - free games galore!



DISC TROUBLES?

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.



EXCLUSIVE!

RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS



Anything else like to rise? No? *Jon Blyth* gets started

www.bighugegames.com/riseoflegends/



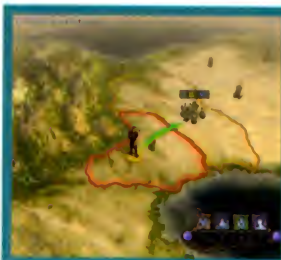
"**IT'S A 100FT** golem thing. Hewn from blood, flame and granite, yes. No, I haven't asked it what it wants.

"What's it doing now? What do you think it's doing? What does every 100ft-tall monstrosity do? It's looming with an air of overwhelming menace, that's what it's bloody doing...

"Look, I'm not being unreasonable, the room's lovely and the food's delicious. I'm just saying that we're under relentless

assault from a menagerie of golems, dragons, steel birds - steel birds, for Christ's sake - and I think we at least deserve a 10% discount. Oh... I see. Well, thank you." (Click.) "No, it's no good, darling. They said it's always like this and that it's already reflected in the price. Well, put your dress on - it's barn dancing in the Portillo Suite at 8.30."

Brief but interesting information about the demo: you'll be able to play single-player as one of the three races in the full game.



MOVE...

It shouldn't be too difficult to take over that city - you're three times faster than it is! You can crush them all like the ridiculous ants they are. Who's the big man now, eh? You! You're the big man, and no-one will ever hurt you again!



AND BUILD...

Now you've got a little home zone, build yourself a magic district. The desert Ain't race lose their magic powers, and you'll also get research points to spend on new abilities. Shockingly, there's a minicourse, to put your owners to work.



YOUR SANDY FRONT... We don't like deserters



AND DIE!

Oh no. Looks like complete victory was a bit far, and now we're getting attacked and wiped out by an army with big spiky arms. Oh well. I can always scroll around the map and click on things for a bit, while everyone dies.



AND BUILD...

That flying insect thing is bringing back titanium from the mines, we've built a lovely purple box and we've got a couple of defence towers. I'm quite pleased with myself, so I'm going to stand around doing nothing for 20 minutes, staring



EXCLUSIVE!



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Artefact me till I fart

www.tombraider.com

EVEN Highbrow academics, when writing a critical appraisal of the rise of Lara Croft from gaming icon to media franchise, tend to just write 'phwoo, she's got big knockers'.

You can't write anything about *Tomb Raider* without mentioning the tits. So it's with profound self-control that I introduce the *Legend* demo, in which I refuse to mention boobs, tits, wabs, chapel hat pegs or milky pillows. Instead, I'll simply state, with sombre gravitas, that you'll be playing Lara's first level in Bolivia, while batting myself on the back of the head with my shoe.



A First-Timer's Guide To Raiding Tomb It May Concern



TRAPS

When you see a huge pit filled with whirling blades, don't hurl your body into the void and have fat-sand chunks of flesh ripped from your torso. Instead, use your grappling hook to sail over the chasm. The way you'll avoid it's right gougung.



PRESSURE PLATES

Pressure Plate puzzles were first used in *The Adventure Game*, in which three celebrities had to stand on three sets of scales to open a door behind which a growling plant pot would aggressively stab its leaves. Classic television.

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS **EXCLUSIVE!**

You, with the steel pipe, everywhere

www.condemnedgame.com

A SERIAL KILLER who mucks about with mannequins in a creepy way, a large assortment of murderous gymnastic tramps, the death of a colleague, and birds dropping out of the sky with mushed-up brains.

That's what I want for Christmas and I've told everyone, so if I get a Selection Box again I'll be really pissed off. Well, there's always this violent-as-hell demo to play through until I find out. It's a consolation.



TASERS AMAZE US Are friends electrocuted?



1 Your taser can incapacitate an attacker, but it takes time to recharge. So what are you going to do while it's charging? The answer is: twat them with a pipe.

2 These dark, moody games are great. *Condemned* reeks of tension, and made Suzy throw off her headphones in startled shock. Girls!

3 Homeless men are smart and never come after you with their bare hands. Instead, they'll pick up a wrench and pull plumbing from the walls in a bid to stove in your head.

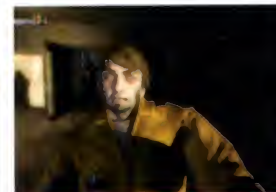
KILLPEDIA

A very brief guide to the people you'll be killing



Cyclops

He's just a mind-mad bastard coming at me with his bare hands. Not the best-considered weapon, but then, he is mental!



Ten Years Younger

A lifetime of poverty, insanity and irrational hatred have damaged this guy's complexion. I'll iron out the wrinkles with a smack in the chops.

THE BEST OF THE REST



SPELLFORCE 2

As previously mentioned, we'd love to go to the pub with a dwarf, but maybe not an elf. There's plenty of the stingy, pointy-eared gin-drinkers in this *SpellForce 2* demo, which has plenty of fantasy fun for all the family. spellforce.jowood.com/sf2



EVOLUTION GT

Unlike elves – who talk about magic casting and attract lady-boys – big cars are brilliant for taking to the pub and impressing barmaids. This demo features some all-time classic town motors, like the Renault Clio, the chariot of the under-privileged masses. www.blackbeangames.com



GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS II

Unfortunately, you can't drive cars home after binge drinking. Spaceships, however, are fantastic for post-pub travelling (there's no space-lampposts to crash into) and feature heavily in this *Galactic Civilizations II* demo – which gets it a thumbs-up from us. www.galciv2.com



BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS

While we're on the subject, we've never seen anyone scream a Spitfire to our local ether – but we're sure the young old man who drives the bar would have a lot to say about them. He'd probably like this *Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII* demo too. www.blazing-angels.com

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V

www.mightandmagic.com/HeroesV



The idea of a but comfy route full of strategy games is all to pull its own weight up in an effort to appeal to anyone other than the hardcore fans. With Dark Alliance taking the world's first-person strategy territory, there's a need to feel miniature battles.

GTI RACING

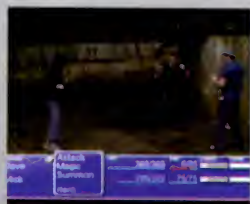
www.fileplanet.com/filelist.aspx?s=104031



Who wants to play the game named around the V4? Get here? You do! What, and not as well? Along, then, down at the bottom of the demo, there's a link to the demo, not all at once – you'll make the internet into a million tiny pieces.

PCZONE
HOT
DOWNLOADS

SNIPPETS



FANTASY, FINALLY

www.collegehumor.com/movies/1673352/

As much as we loathe linking to a site like College Humor (sic) where ball_hits_man_in_crotch.avi is heralded as the pinnacle of all things funny, we quite enjoyed this nerdy yet vaguely amusing live-action *Final Fantasy VII* movie. If you've never played the RPG, you won't have a clue what's going on – but if you have, you'll either love it or cringe with embarrassment.



HOPPING MAD

www.i-am-bored.com

Remember that Sony Bravia advert? You know, the one where someone lobbs thousands of coloured balls down a steep San Francisco road? Well, some talented chap has made an excellent spoof of the ad in *Battlefield 2*, displaying brilliance in both movie-making and bunny-hopping. Hop on dear friends, hop on.

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS AND VAULTS, OH MY!

Orcs might jump high – but *Dragon's Vault*...

www.ddo.com

HAVE YOU EVER played *Dungeons & Dragons Online* and thought, "Hmm, I'd really enjoy some more dungeons – and you know what, I wouldn't mind a few more dragons around here either"? Assuming you went off and prayed about it later on, your prayers have been answered, as Turbine have announced the first official add-on for their hugely popular MMORPG.

The free *Dragon's Vault* add-on contains 15 dungeons and one dragon, placing the dungeon-to-dragon ratio of the expansion at a healthy 15:1. Now get this – open your bibles on John 15:1 and read the following passage: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.' Vines. Could Turbine be hinting at a new in-game profession? Grape-growing? Who knows, but we'll keep our sleuth hats on and keep digging for clues.

People buy them when they're small and cute.



Must take him ages to get ready in the morning.

WIN A PC WORTH £1,000!

Impress with an FPS and win an NVIDIA super-charged Dell XPS gaming PC!



THIS IS A GENTLE nudge to indicate that if you haven't yet constructed a five-minute opus within *FPS Creator* for our extra-creative competition, then you're running out of time.

Thanks to the fine folks at NVIDIA and The Game Creators, we've managed to bag an über-powerful Dell XPS 600 coupled with an NVIDIA GeForce 7800 graphics card, something with so much power in it that the box it comes in makes a gentle humming sound. Two sparkly NVIDIA graphics cards and two full *FPS Creator* kits will also be dished out to runners-up.

For a chance to win, wrap your head around the trial version of *FPS Creator* (Issue 163, 53%) on our DVD, and create us an FPS worthy of the Dell XPS's majesty. Don't forget to pay close attention to the rules (see right).



- Entries must consist of a single level built in *FPS Creator*
- Entries must take around five minutes to complete
- Entries must not contain any copyrighted or offensive material
- Entries must be sent to **PC ZONE** at the usual address on a single CD or DVD (nothing else!)

Entries will be judged by an expert panel on design, use of graphics and sound, playability and all-round fun-ness. Normal **PC ZONE** competition rules apply (see page 9). You have until Wednesday, May 24. Good luck!

SNIPPETS

UMBRELLA BIOHAZARD COUNTERMEASURE SERVICE

Four long words then seven short ones www.ubcs-mod.net

RESIDENT EVIL MEETS Half-Life 2? What was once an obstacle-pushing, key-finding chore of awkwardly stitched-together CCTV footage and terror-through-shit-controls (in our opinion), recently evolved into one of the finest slabs of action gaming there's ever been (in everyone's opinion). The *UBCS Half-Life 2* mod takes the earlier *Resi* games, and funnels the characters and locations of Raccoon City into the Source engine.

Players will participate as members of the UBSC team, who must stop the T-Virus from spreading faster than your mum on a motorbike, but there's even a suggestion that you'll be able to take

part as an undead Doberman. How much fun it might be to play as a bitey-faced mutt (though dog experts do insist that the breed makes a loving family pet) we can only imagine, although it suddenly sounds more interesting now it's written down.

The maps will include all the classic locations – Raccoon Police Department, the evil laboratories of Umbrella Corp and the Hive Mansion. There'll also be crows. Work began in February, and at this stage we're a long way from completion, but keep an eye on the *UBCS* homepage, where they'll be pulling the white blankets from more features as progress continues.



An actual raccoon police force would be great.



Not this place again.

PKR

Can I have a vowel please, Carol? www.pkr.com

WHY DON'T YOU play online poker? Because you know you've got a worryingly addictive personality? Because you're under 18? Because you always forget whether aces are high or low?

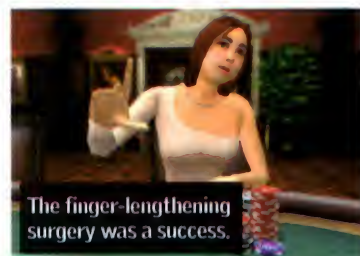
Perhaps all of the above... Or, more likely, because gambling websites always look like the business end of a pig's arse. The idea behind *PKR*, then, is to smother the experience in atmosphere and pretty juice – so that even if you're flushing your life savings into a fat man from Milwaukee's pocket, then at least you've designed how your avatar looks and have earned him some natty new clothing through your round-the-clock play.

It's an ingenious idea created by poker-obsessed games developers, most notably Jez San (who founded

Argonaut and also helped create the SNES Super FX chip that made *Star Fox* possible). It's also super-detailed and so designed to entrap obsessives that it's unlikely to fail. If you don't want to piss all your money into the Internet, then fake money can also be played with (thus the coverage in these pages) – but just don't go swimming with sharks before you're ready.



"Pass the salt please, dear."



The finger-lengthening surgery was a success.



Idiot's holding his cards the wrong way.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
BATTLEFIELD 2



The v1.2 patch means: 'Dolphin Diving is no longer possible.' Dolphins are pleased.

8

Movie of the Month

BATTLEFIELD 2142
We love our Nazi shooters, but World War II is getting a little over-used in the FPS arena. Ever vigilant, the chaps at DICE have left behind the Lugers and Spitfires of old and opted for levitating hover-planes and giant, stomping robots in this *Battlefield 2142* trailer. Here's a run-down...



Global warming is causing chaos in 2142 – that's what you get for leaving the landing lights on.



The narrator is still rambling on about war. Where are the lasers and hover-cars?!



Now this is more like it – giant robots with even erm, gianter guns!



The game can render literally billions of invisible soldiers. And three visible.



COMMAND THE FORCE

It's a *Star Wars* mod for *C&C: Renegade*, y'know

newhope.conquergaming.com

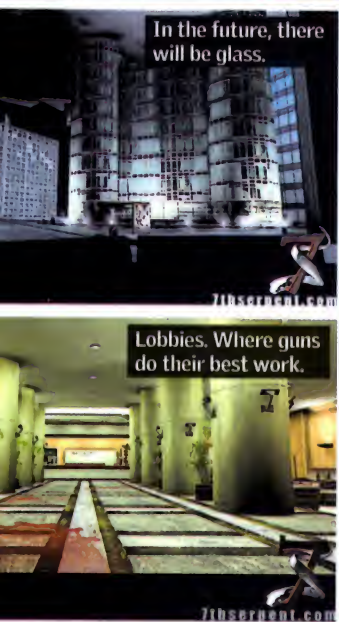
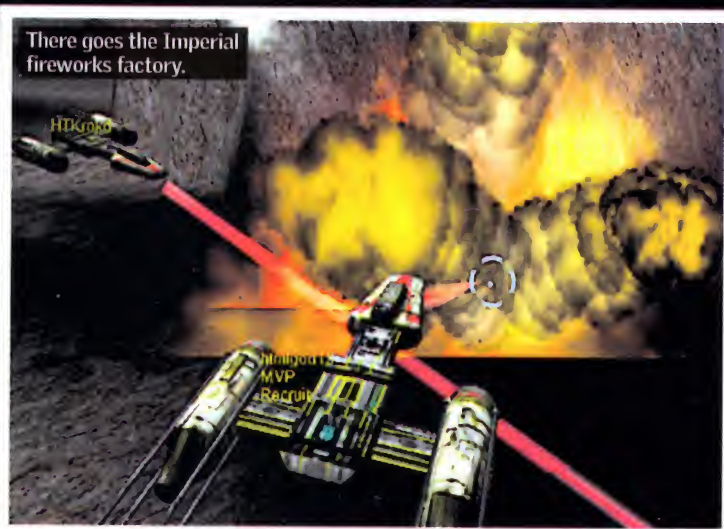
THEM FANS OF *Star Wars* just won't stop modding, and this time they're bending the *C&C: Renegade* engine to their dark wills with *Renegade: A New Hope*. According to the website, and keeping true to any sense of decency, 'No material from *Episodes I to III* will be included'.

A mod for the multiplayer mode, *Renegade* will bring you maps based on the *Star Wars* world, and 12 vehicles and weapons from the series. Thanks to the limitations of the engine, and even though Luke and Darth are

present, you won't be able to use Jedi powers or lightsabers. There are also the most obvious characters from the films – Han, Threepio, Stormtroopers – as well as fish-necked Admiral Ackbar, the character that made life hell in the '80s for the similarly named shopkeeper at the end of my road.

The updates have been quieter of late, but team leader HTMLGOD (his capitals) assures us he's been working hard in between his exams, that it's nearly finished, and they're aiming for a release in the middle of the year.

There goes the Imperial fireworks factory.



SNAKE IN THE GRASS

7th Serpent hisses all over its rivals www.7thserpent.com

WITH HALL OF MIRRORS a few pages further along, *7th Serpent: Crossfire* brings this month's *Max Payne 2* mod total up to two. That's almost a bonanza. *7th Serpent* however, is a total conversion, concerning itself more with carving out its own storyline than adding some fancy new animations and an athletic man in a classy white suit.

Set in the near future, the storyline revolves around the travels of one man, Vince Petero. After being experimented on at the whim of secretive government agents, he loses his memory and becomes a super-soldier with a single mission

– to slap a big hairy bollock of justice into the collective faces of the evil wrong-doers who probed and modified his once-normal body. The setting looks suitably dark too, with dystopian urban outdoor areas similar to that of *Blade*, and sleek marble indoor arenas just screaming to be riddled with bullet holes.

The developers of *7th Serpent* plan to release content in the increasingly popular episodic format, beginning with the prologue which, if the developers are to be trusted, should be out as you read this very sentence. If not, check out the movie on their website instead.



SMOOTH CRIMINAL

Half-Life 2 gets on the wrong side of the law in *Dreamscape: Pin Point Blank*

www.dreamscapemod.com

THERE HAVEN'T EXACTLY been too many crime-based titles since the days of *Kingpin*, but *Dreamscape: Pin Point Blank* looks set to resolve that by replacing the sci-fi world of *Half-Life 2* for a sin-filled world of crime.

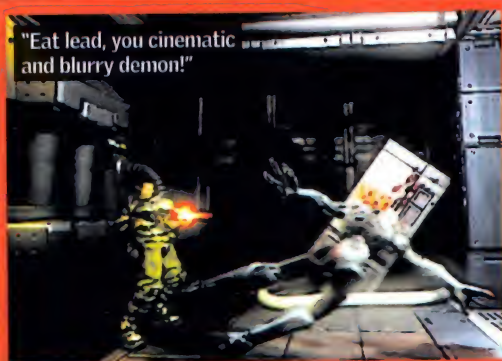
You play as Virgil Coltreese, a former mafia bodyguard gone good who's been forced back into his old life in order to rectify his brother's misdeeds. Key among the mod's features are the Pin Point system, an accurate damage

model (get shot in the arm and your shooting accuracy will suffer); and the Point Blank system where close-range enemies can be taken down with some lethal melee attacks.

This 12-level, single-player mod promises to be a dark and brutal take on the seedy underworld, and with features such as sanity levels, plenty of gore and buying and selling drugs, *Dreamscape* could prove that while crime might not pay, it certainly is free to download.



"Eat lead, you cinematic and blurry demon!"



WE'VE GOT FUN AND GAMES

Welcome To Hell, machinima now showing

www.shaolinproductions.org

A FEW YEARS back this machinima trailer for *Doom 3* would've had us quivering in anticipation for *Doom's* screen debut. We now know that the *Doom* movie turned out to be a big pile of excrement, and can only marvel at the craftsmanship that went into making this machinima movie, *Welcome To Hell*.

Machinima is the art of making a movie entirely inside a game engine, and while it's great for demon-blasting, the *Doom 3* engine proves to be lacking somewhat when it comes to the world of celluloid, as we've spotted some frame-rate problems about halfway through. We bet Spielberg doesn't have to put up with this.

SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE BAND

Vivendi search for musical talent for the *Scarface* game

www.myspace.com/scarfacegame

CREATORS OF THE forthcoming *Scarface*: *The World Is Yours* title were short of a soundtrack to accompany Tony's cocaine-addled adventures, so they set up a talent contest to find the hottest unsigned talent in America. From the 200 top artists nominated on the

MySpace community, judges whittled down the competition to 20 finalists and after a week of voting, the lucky winner Kazy, will have his song featured in-game and also get to play it at a concert at E3. Remember, you f*** with Tony Montana, you f***ing with the best.



SO, YOU WANT TO BE A... NET GAMES JOURNO



NAME Graeme Boyd

WORKING ON

www.netn.co.uk

AGE 25

PREVIOUS

EXPERIENCE CVG, com, pczone.co.uk and CVG magazine

PCZ How did you get started?

GB I popped straight out of a Journalism degree at university into the open arms of CVG magazine, having decided I preferred playing games to chasing ambulances for the local rag. When the mag sadly folded, I took my contacts and moved into the future: the Interweb.

PCZ What's the pay like?

GB Well, I don't rub myself with diamonds every night, but the perks are pretty good. I get to travel the world on press trips, meet really cool and interesting people from the games industry, and getting the opportunity to go to E3 every year pays for itself...

PCZ What does your job involve?

GB Scouring the newswires, sniffing up news truffles like a dirty dictaphone-wielding pig, interviewing leading lights in the industry and making sure the site works.

PCZ How rewarding is your job?

GB There's nothing better than seeing an exclusive story spread across the Internet like avian flu.

PCZ What's the most annoying part of the job?

GB Things can move fast in the world of online games news, so you can't really relax for long or someone will beat you to the punch. Also, it pisses me right off when someone nicks your story.

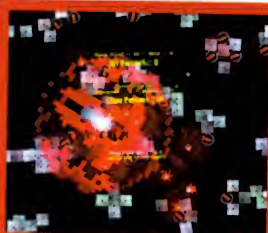
WE SAY... DIY

Write, write, write. The best way to jump aboard the games journalism train is with a ticket made of a passion for the written word and a pair of jumping boots made of previous writing experience. And tea-making skills.

Freeware

Steve Hogarty likes to keep tiny moths in his wallet, just for effect

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes, webgames or emulation – you'll never have to buy another game again. This month we've got ninjas, Pong, spaceships, a cat with a cannon and retro FPS-on-rails with stickmen...



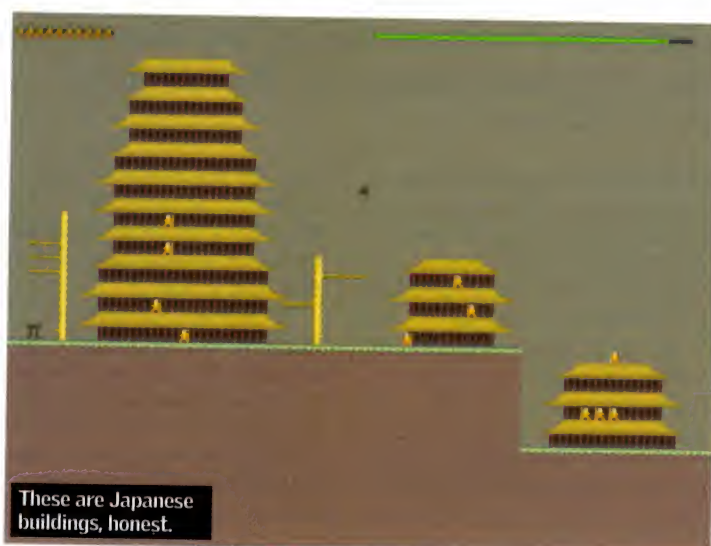
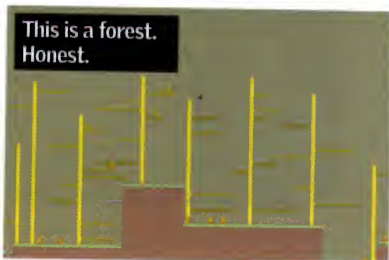
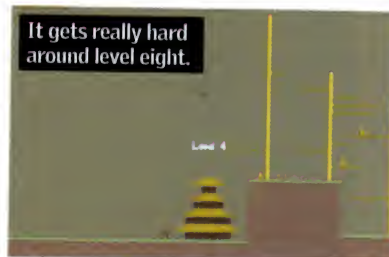
FORWARD ALWAYS FORWARD

Cos we can't find reverse

Developer: Iteration Games
Website: www.iterationgames.com

WHILE NOT BEING

hugely innovative, *Forward Always Forward* manages to achieve something most games seem to miss: a definite sense of style and design. Essentially, it's about controlling a ship using the WASD keys, rotating it to point at the big laser-spewing turrets and avoiding all manner of obstacles, but *FAF* does it with a certain style which is bound to keep your interest. Despite the gameplay and clumsy controls, stylish touches like the Mode 7-esque rotation of the screen as you move about and the glowing, crackling bolts of red stuff you must avoid make this a must-see.



SUPER SECRET NINJA

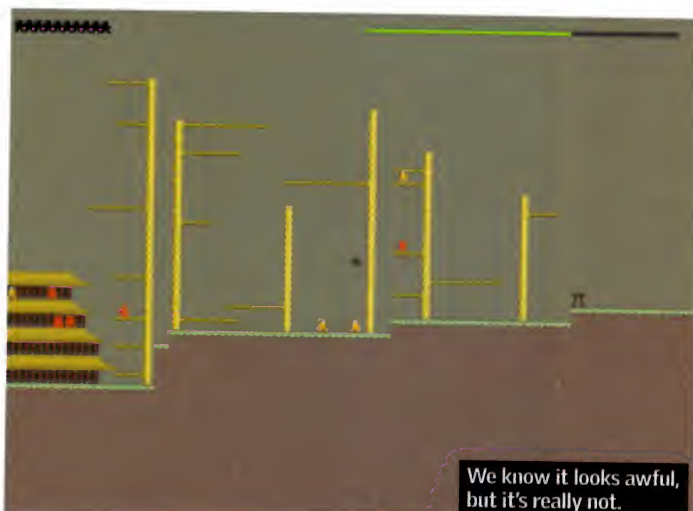
Flipping out and killing stuff was never funny

Developer: Juuso Salonen | www.acid-play.com/download/super-secret-ninja/

THE NINJA IS one of the best inventions in history, second only to pirates, ninja-pirates and the extremely rare pirate-ninjas. Furthermore, if Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison and John Logie Baird got together to invent something, it would only be half as amazing as the ninja grappling hook, which has allowed man to scale dojo after dojo in his eternal quest to extract the soft, spongy knowledge which lies within them.

Super Secret Ninja is a side-scrolling platform game which uses the ninja grappling hook as an ingenious and amazingly fun way of getting across the level. It's similar to the ninja rope in *Worms*, and while your character is quite agile on terra firma, you'll spend most of your time swinging from platform to platform like some crazy bastard offspring of Spiderman and Mario. The challenge comes in the form of the guards roaming the various treetops and dojo roofs – they can't hurt you (you're a ninja), but they can spot you and hear you. If too many are alerted, you lose. If the time runs out, you lose. Thus you fulfil the two rules of ninja-ism – be quick and be quiet.

It's simple, and as is the way with simplistic fun, it's addictive as hell. In fact, ten minutes have just passed since I wrote that last sentence as I went off and played it again 'for screenshots'. Speaking of which, the game's visuals are bland and repetitive, the animations basic and each randomly-generated level is hit-and-miss in terms of playability. Some extra features wouldn't have gone amiss either, like time bonuses and perhaps a 'Not Touching The Ground' award, but as it stands *Super Secret Ninja* is a maddeningly addictive and hugely enjoyable ninja-platformer.



PLASMA PONG

Spewing fluids, long bats and not an innuendo in sight

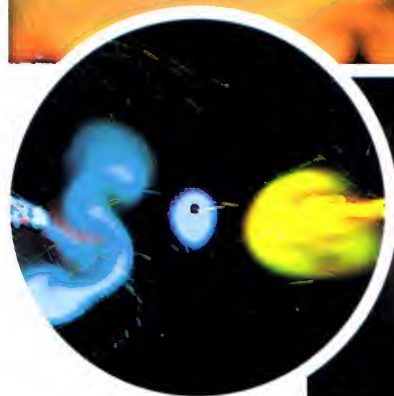
Developer: Steve Taylor | www.plasmapong.com

PONG IS WIDELY believed to be the first video-electronic entertainment game. It can be dated as far back as Ancient Rome where it was called *Pongus*, and in more recent times Ancient France, where Marie Antionette once said: "J'adore le *Pongue*." It's had many popular spin-offs such as table tennis and big tennis, but connoisseurs of the sport slate these derivative versions as diluted adaptations of the original.

And so we come to present day and *Plasma Pong*, the culmination of a study of fluid dynamics and a bit of imagination. Picture this: you're in the bath with a hairdryer – actually wait, no, you're underwater in a swimming pool with an insulated fan which blasts water out in front of you. Hmmm, actually... Remember that time on *Blue Peter* where they made a miniature tabletop football game in which you had to use straws to blow the ball around and the presenter stuck the straw up his nose out of habit? *Plasma Pong* is a bit like that.

Utilising some impressive particle physics, *Plasma Pong* allows you not only to bounce the ball back at your opponent, but also to blow it about with jets of water. Then, with your opponent doing the same thing, the entire playing area

soon becomes a swirling mass of fluids which propels the ball every which way. With an epic score and fast-paced action, *Plasma Pong* is a great twist on some classic gameplay.



CANNON CAT

Developer: d_0t_1 | www.d_0t_1.com

Flying through the air so fancy-free

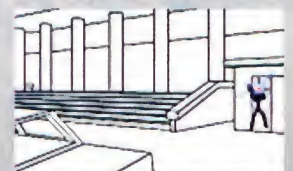
IT'S LIKE SOMEBODY tore open my ribcage, reached into my chest, dissected my heart to discover my innermost fantasies and desires, then made a game all about them. So here it is at long last, a game featuring a cat with a big cannon strapped to it.

You don't control the cat directly: instead, you fire cannonballs from the cat's cannon to propel the kitty along its desired path. Of course, enemies can be destroyed using the cannon too, and the 3D side-scrolling levels soon become a matter of balancing propulsion with the need to attack the beasts who wish to harm the cat. *Cannon Cat* is insane fun, and the music is great too. And as Shakespeare once wrote: "If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved a cat with a cannon on its back."



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

XiaoXiao No. 4



Developer: DigitalMG
www.digitalmg.ws/games.php

There's nothing better than strolling into an arcade, marching right up to *Time Crisis* or *House Of The Dead*, grabbing the sticky plastic lump of a gun, ignoring the glob of phlegm some young ragamuffin deposited on the side of it and enjoying some heavily-scripted first-person shooting action. Well, there are actually quite a few things better than that, but for the sake of hyperbole let's pretend there's not. That makes *XiaoXiao No. 4* the best freeware webgame of the month ever!

As per the style of *XiaoXiao*, everything is portrayed with stickmen and your task involves moving through a generic compound killing stickmen who, despite lacking facial features, seem pretty angry at you. It's short, lasting only a few minutes, but while it lasts it's quite a bit of fun. And there's no chance of claw-split on your hands.

FREEPLAYPLAY!



HALL OF MIRRORS

Steve Hogarty checks his hair in this new *Max Payne 2* mod hom.paynereactor.com



AFTER PLAYING *Hall Of Mirrors*, it's clear that basing a *Max Payne 2* mod on a movie like *Equilibrium* presents a problem. How exactly can you add the multi-directional, super-refined gunplay ethos of the movie to the already perfectly-tuned gunplay of the game without inevitably having the whole thing fall down like a house of cards?

It's a problem faced by anybody trying to modify *Max Payne 2*'s pristinely balanced gameplay, and *Hall Of Mirrors*, while managing to port all the intense action of *Equilibrium* to *Max Payne*'s world, messes with the game's equilibrium in such a way as to make it feel a bit clunky.

Taking the movie's fantastically impressive gun kata combat system

(essentially shooting two people at once) and applying it to the *Max Payne 2* world seems like a great idea, and on many levels it works brilliantly. The characters (of which several are playable) are all modelled well, the animations are precise to the point of pedantry and the combat is stylised and visceral. For example, remember that scene in *Equilibrium* where Preston somersaults over a motorbike, lands in the middle of a group of six bad guys and kills them all with an insanely complex series of fancy gun kata skills? That move is in here.

SIMPLIFY

The problem is you just have to press the spacebar while moving backwards and left to do it. Once you've done that, all you can

do is sit back and watch as your character waves his guns about in every direction, looking decidedly awesome at the expense of any semblance of accuracy. At no point does any sense of skill come into it, and that's where this mod falls down. It's the same for almost every gun technique in the mod too: there's simply no control over what you're doing.

The style of *Hall Of Mirrors* makes up for its lack of substance however, and fans of *Equilibrium* will no doubt get a kick out of this, despite its meagre storyline and lack of real playability. It's not this generation's *Kung Fu* mod, but it's still a shining star in a dearth of decent *Max Payne 2* mods. Besides, any mod that lets you do the sort of things in these screenshots is worth a go.

EMPIRES

Do you like the sound of your own voice? Then this *HL2* mod is for you

www.empiresmod.com

SOME PEOPLE LIKE giving orders. Could be too many hormones, could be because they're making up for a set of mutilated and useless down-below. Whatever the reason, bossy people are out there, and they do love telling people what to do. And it's for these people, partially, that the *Empires* mod team have sculpted this RTS/FPS fusion from *Half-Life 2*'s Source engine, centred around the battles between the Brenodian Empire and the Northern Faction.

Each team is made up of one such barker, who plays from the RTS aspect. The other players take on the role of one of his grunts, playing from the more usual Source FPS angle. There are four classes – scout, engineer, rifleman and

grenadier – and you can be assigned different roles and given spending limits by your commander. So if you don't do as you're told, and you've got a particularly bloody-minded micro-manager, you might find yourself on guard duty. Anyone getting too power-mad should remember that they may get voted out by their grunts. So maybe it's best just to pick on one person and be nice to everyone else.

Reception has been very positive in the modding community too, and the team have gone some way to addressing the lag problems of earlier releases. They've also been working on this since 2003 (originally on the *Battlefield 1942* engine), and it's certainly novel enough to warrant a wee peek.



MINERVA: METASTASIS 2

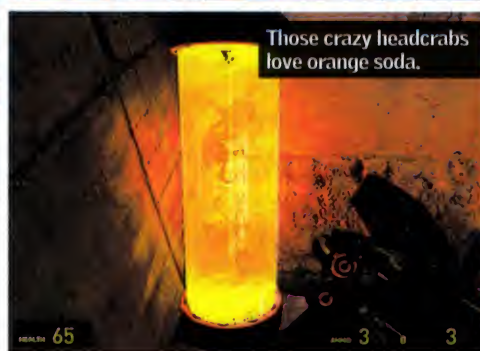
Andy Robinson is getting a tad minervous... www.hylobatidae.org/minerva

THERE'S ALREADY A large selection of impressive *Half-Life 2* mods out there, but few have us cocking our heads with interest quite as much as *Minerva*, the episodic single-player mod with more suspense than San Francisco's Golden Gate and Bristol's Clifton bridges put together.

Minerva: Metastasis 2 is the second serving of the riveting episodic mod, and delves a little deeper in to the mysterious Combine Island and just what the leather-clad fellows on it are up to. With the help of a mysterious third party, you'll solve the island's secrets and blast your way through hordes of

Combine henchman. But will you finally find out your mysterious friend's mysterious identity, thus debasing his mysteriousness? All will eventually be revealed.

Its mysterious plot may be one of the mod's greatest appeals, but in terms of level design, variety and production, *Minerva* straddles the modding scene like a fat man astride a donkey on Brighton beach. The puzzles are clever, the action is frantic and we're already getting impatient for the third chapter to answer our burning questions. But just like an episode of *Lost*, we're sure that the next will leave us even more confused than the last.



PCZONE TOP 5 BIZARRE MODS



- 1 DRAGONFLY VARIATIONS**
The only *Unreal* mod which manages to include really, really big cows and pandas.
- 2 AIR BUCCANEERS**
The only *Unreal* mod which manages to include pirates in hot-air balloons.
- 3 DAY HARD**
The only *Half-Life 2* mod which manages to include Jack Carver as your quirky Italian brother.
- 4 MISTAKE OF PYTHAGORAS**
The only *Half-Life 2* mod which manages to include giant numbers falling from the sky.
- 5 SURREAL**
The only *Battlefield 2* mod which manages to include armoured VW camper vans.

Fight Club



First rule of Fight Club: die Log, die...

**COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!**

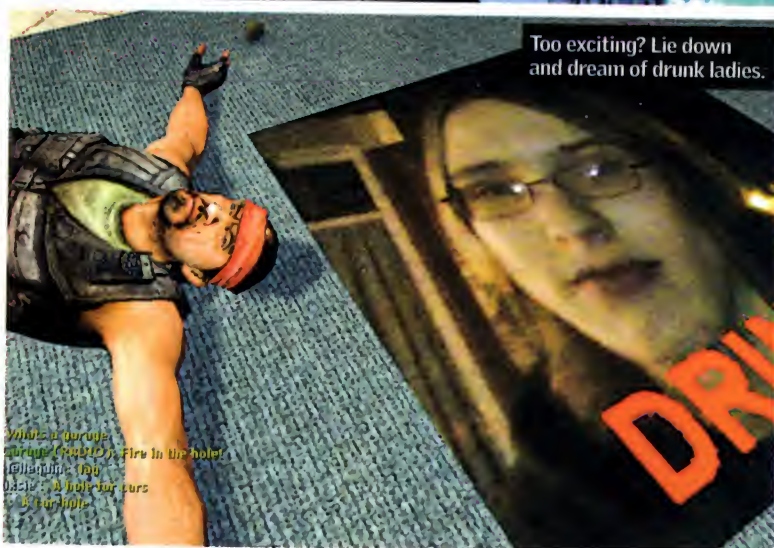
WE'RE SO USED TO being hand-fed our own faeces by you at *Counter-Strike: Source*, that we're numb to the feelings of inadequacy, self-loathing and embarrassment. But with one kudos-free kill to his name (from lucky flashbang blindfire, no less), and the sense that if he was physically in the game he'd be running around the cs_office map with his mouth open and two streams of happy saliva streaming down his hairy chops, Log brought skin-crawling humiliation to even our defeat-jaded souls.

Steve maintained his respectable and unspectacular tradition of being 'pretty OK', and Will positively blossomed when it came to cs_militia, when his childhood hobby of squatting in a tunnel finally came in handy. Nevertheless, it was a fine turnout, and there was a good mix of newcomers and regulars.

Next month's Fight Club will be on Thursday, May 4 at 1800 hours, and it's going to be a *Battlefield 2* jamboree. Bring Will Porter to the slaughter!



CZ_escap



Too exciting? Lie down and dream of drunk ladies.



"NOW say that Wham! were better than Duran Duran..."

AND THE WINNER IS...

Spray it, don't say it

WITH FIGHT CLUB comes the Fight Club Tag and Screenshot Competition. Every month, the most brilliant tag is rewarded with a bag. A bag so stuffed with impossibly desirable goodies, that we wouldn't be surprised if the postman nicked it all and replaced it with a pile of unwanted crap. We also send another bag out to the best screenshot emailed to fightclubscreenshots@pczone.co.uk, but I dare say that one will somehow get filled with rubbish, too.

Best screenshot goes to Mr Ubersnail Bettany, who captured perfectly the sense that death is nothing more than an extreme version of 'having a little rest'. The winning tag goes to the 'Sharp Edges' signpost, mainly because the 'Horse Eats Hat' picture was one of ours, and frankly we don't want the amazing prize bag. We're trying to give it away.

BEST SCREENSHOT



BEST TAG



ZONE CHAT



It's good to talk. And type.
Tippety tappety lol...

READ
THE FULL
TRANSCRIPT AT
WWW.ZONEGAMES.CO.UK/

IT WAS A BIT OF A ONE-MAN show this month, with Will turning what was supposed to be a convivial chat about PC gaming into a discourse that wouldn't have been out of place in the pages of *Metal Hammer*.

The relevant merits of various rock and goth chicks were intricately discussed, the consensus on Cristina Scabbia from Italian goth-metal band Lacuna Coil being that "we probably would". A sense of duty inevitably led to banter on topics such as *Oblivion* and *Half-Life 2: Episode One* – although much of it punctuated by members of the chat digging up more and more photos of said rock goddess for all-round grubby perusal.

Next *ZONE Chat* will be taking place on Wednesday, May 3 at 5pm. Do come along, and bring some delicious imaginary foods to offer around between asterisks.



Cristina Scabbia.
We would.

How to join in!



If you fancy joining the *ZONE Chat*, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a Quakenet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps your flatmate's sending a long email to an ex, he's crying and you don't want to disturb him – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. *ZONE* staff might even be there. The latest information can always be found at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Andy Robinson PCZ_EssexHoodlum
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Sam Kieldsen PCZ_BoyWonda
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

- 1 **SWAT 4**
swat4.zonegames.co.uk
- 2 **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025
cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015
- 3 **HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- 4 **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- 5 **BATTLEFIELD 1942 DC MODDED**
dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567
- 6 **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- 7 **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
- 8 **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004**
ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777
ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888
- 9 **CALL OF DUTY**
cod.zonegames.co.uk:28960
- 10 **JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING**
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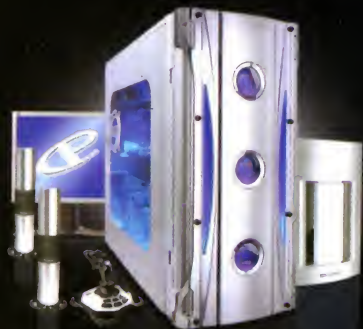
Asus® nForce 4 SLI Chipset MB with Dual 16x PCI Express
Genuine Windows® XP Home Edition w/ SP2
Corsair® 1024MB PC3200 DDR400 Memory
400GB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 16M Cache Ultra Fast HD
NVIDIA® Geforce 7900GTX 512MB Video
16x DVD-ROM, 16x Double Layer DVD+/-RW Drive
NVIDIAR nForce4 5.1 3-D Surround Sound
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NZXT® Lexa Tower Case w/MOD "See-Through Window"
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Get started in... D&D Online

Dan Griliopoulos shows you how to have a group hug for a spell in *Stormreach*...

YOU FANCY YOURSELF quite the Conan, eh? Strutting your stuff, beating up on rats all by yourself? Well, chap, you're doing it all wrong. *D&D Online* is all about getting together with your pals and beating up on giants, not struggling against rodents solo. Below, you'll find eight tips from an old hand (it's been out for, like, a week) on how to make the most of your time in the game. The biggest tip we can give you is 'stick with it'; it gets much better if you can make it to the marketplace and the higher levels...

01 MAKE AN ACE BOD

It's all too easy to cock your character up in the creation process. Pick your class first, then pick your race – work out which attributes are needed for your class and simply maximise them. Pick a class that's normally in short supply, like a rogue or a healer – you'll find it much easier to get a group. If you plan on multi-classing later, think about that when you're choosing your statistics – always take the class with the highest skill bonus as your initial class, as you get a four-fold boost in your skill points for your first level. Don't multi-class frivolously...



02 The night train

Doing the training missions gives you a chance to try out your character's abilities and see if you enjoy them; it's also the only solo play you'll get in the game, so enjoy it. These also give you a chance to see who else is new and what everyone's picking at the moment (in case you want to restart your character if everyone's playing as a Dwarf bard as well.) Plus, you kinda have to do the first one (inside the tavern) just to get to the port.

03 GROUP HUG

The missions level system is prejudiced towards groups. A level-one mission assumes you have a group of four level-one people. A level-four character should be able to do a level-one mission by himself, by that account – but he or she will get penalised for being too high-level! Therefore, stay in groups at all times. Joining a guild early on is an excellent idea, as it gives you a regular supply of people to pester when you log on. A group should always have a healer, rogue and fighter – everyone else will just bring extra damage to the party.



04 A fine port

Having done your training, you'll arrive in port but be unable to progress past the main gates. Speak to Lord Gerald Goodblade outside the tavern, then speak to the tavern keeper and his maid Aida inside (lag will kick in for slower computers here). Go into the cellar and complete the various tasks in there, go outside and take the easy Scrolls quest from Goodblade. Wander into the warehouse next to him, solve the power puzzle by walking on the squares and wander out to get your reward from Goodblade. Wander up to the guard and he'll let you through the gate – or you can do the Low Road for more XP. Similarly, to get to the marketplace, you need to talk to the harbourmaster and complete all the Waterworks quests.

05 A SMALL SKILLING

Remember to use your skills! Everyone should block or tumble to keep damage down. Get your rogues to sneak behind magic users, use trips on those giants to keep them down while you nobble them (so they don't get a chance to use their area effect blows) and let the players with the highest spot value go in the front. If you see an odd-looking wall or notice that there seems to be more of a room on the map, get someone with a high search skill to have a look – it's likely to be a secret door. Likewise, if you spot a trap or a locked chest, let the rogue at it – and rogues, always carry enough thief tools with you.



06 The right tool

A good pack rat will carry around one of each type of weapon, as well as spare cheap blunt weapons for dealing with annoying oozes (which split when hit with edged weapons, but rust anything else that hits them.) For your elucidation, you'll need bludgeoning, piercing, slashing and ranged weapons (for when you've got an impassable area between you and the bad), preferably all magic. Higher-level characters should also try and get each of the 18 types of bane. Bind them to one of your hotkey slots so they're available whenever you need them in fights.



07 COLLECT CRAP

Pick up anything you see and take it to one of the collectors, either in the harbour or the marketplace and they'll give you free goodies in return. If you see boxes, barrels or crates, smash 'em – some levels give you XP bonuses for that. Nick stuff from chests until you're burdened or your inventory is full; if you have to chuck stuff away, the info panel can tell you how much each thing is worth and which collector wants it. And if a buddy dies, grab his soulstone and take it to the resurrection point.



08 ROLEPLAY!

Forsooth, a varlet desiring to strut his stuff on the world's stage? Seriously, role-playing groups tend to be better organised and more mature than normal groups. Pick your alignment carefully then and write your biography with it in mind, as both will reveal your history to other hardcore role-players. Put-eth random 'e's and 'eth's on the ends of youre wordes in text and voice-chat to get that authentic olde world/Somerset accent. **WOT**





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HOW TO...

Make a game

PART TEN

Dan Marshall signs himself up for a revolution...



Roll credits, fade to black...


So there you have it, *Gibbage* is all but done. I'm off to catch up on some sleep and try to decide whether or not I can face doing a swishy sequel. In the meantime, why don't you try making games instead of playing them? Or at the very least, play a game with some pizzazz and style for a change. A game with some zing. I think we all know which one I'm talking about...

know I always intended it to be a fun, two-player, socially acceptable waste of time.

Like *Worms* or *Bomberman*...

"*Worms* is a good example of why some games are better in 2D", Costikyan says. "It's an approach, and the whole point is to get away from the group-think of the conventional industry. 'Let a thousand flowers blossom, let a thousand games contend' is one of our mottoes. It's about finding new ways to play, and niches that aren't being adequately served by the conventional industry. Is *Gibbage* the one true path? Certainly not. But it may well be a path..."

And with that, he's gone. Now, with a deeper understanding of the indie market, I can better understand my customers and find out if Man-At-Arms and Orko ever got it on at the end...

And there you have it. With a tear in my eye, I'm off to add my final lines of code to *Gibbage*, submit it to *ZONE* and then wish I hadn't insulted Sefton a few paragraphs ago. It's been a long, horrible journey, but I've loved every second of it. Now go buy my game and make me rich! 

Check out the *Gibbage* review next month!

If you want more...

www.manifestogames.com

Find out all about Greg Costikyan's indie crusade...

www.gibbage.co.uk

It's almost done! It may even be up by the time you read this! Uh, best not to count on it, though...

encoremusic.dmusic.com

Mike Watts' music portfolio. He has a child on the way and I'm too tight to pay him. So go here and feed him compliments. He lives off them...

www.psychotoad.com

Haven't got a DVD drive? Head here and download the demo...

IF YOU DON'T know who Greg Costikyan is, you will do soon enough. He's the chap who stuck his head above the parapet recently, realising the industry seemed to be churning out utter rot, and screamed "Make it stop!" in a loud, defiant voice.

Manifesto Games is set to revolutionise the industry. They're pushing for something different, and it's a movement I'm keen to be a part of. I'm looking to hack about with my code to make sure *Gibbage* slots neatly into the indie market. So, still glowing with pride from continuing emails of support (and, bizarrely, requests for nude patches) from *ZONE* readers, I fire off an email to Manifesto HQ and eagerly await a response...

"The problem is," Costikyan tells me, "that basically, I suck at games like this. I never did manage to get the hang of WASD-style interfaces, and was never much of a platform gamer. Consequently, I'm not likely to get deep enough into the game to make meaningful gameplay comments."

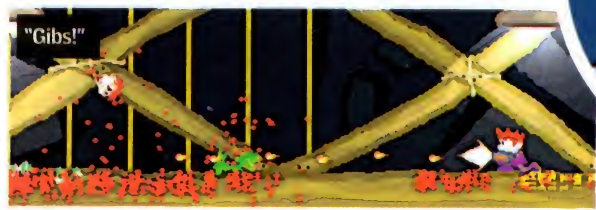
Fair enough – it's a little bit like asking Sefton for advice on the most expensive London cocktail bars. To be honest though, I've had plenty of advice as to where the gameplay needs tightening, and how the AI occasionally seems to give up and looks like he's playing a different game entirely. I want to know if the ethos behind *Gibbage* is on the right track – does it stick two fingers up at EA's marketing men, and pull a moonie at their new Porsche T-W4T?

"We're looking at everything and anything that a) isn't back-catalogue from a major publisher, b) isn't a 'casual' game, and c) doesn't completely suck. And something that we think someone might actually pay for," Costikyan adds.

JUICY WONGA

Pay? What, real money? "Depending on the number of levels and length of play (and it looks like it's got quite a few), I think I'd price it at \$15. I doubt you'd see much drop-off in sales between \$10 and \$15, so why not go for a few extra bucks? The gameplay is there – people who aren't going to be interested are going to reach that conclusion on the basis of the screenshots in all likelihood, rather than anything else."

Bucks? Sales? Drop-off? This is all starting to sound rather serious, and a little like a meeting with my bank manager. I turn the topic of conversation to something a little more palatable – have I succeeded in the philosophy under which *Gibbage* was created? If you're a regular reader, you'll



abandonware

Andy Robinson with the videogames that time (and publishers) forgot...

What is abandonware?

Abandonware is computer software that's no longer being sold or supported by its copyright holder, such as the classic sci-fi RPG shooter *System Shock 2*. However, game copyright is protected by law for 70 years, so even though you can't buy these games, downloading them is technically illegal. *PC ZONE* doesn't condone filthy criminals. Or even ones who've had a good scrub.



DESERT STRIKE

DEVELOPER Electronic Arts
YEAR OF RELEASE 1994



WHEN A PSYCHO madman is threatening the world with nuclear terrorism, there's only one thing to do; fill an apache helicopter with as many missiles as you can and go on a Middle-Eastern shooting rampage. You could call Jack Bauer as well, but he wasn't around in 1994.

Chuck aside the horribly clichéd plot and you've got yourself an action game with an unstoppable appeal to anyone with a pulse and a searing lust for destruction.

Cruising the gulf in your pimped-out chopper, you control your rocket-stocked beast from an isometric viewpoint, and go about your world-saving business picking

up POWs with your winch and obliterating unsuspecting soldiers with your mounted machine guns.

Desert Strike was originally released for the Amiga and Mega Drive to great success, and was later ported to good old MS DOS in 1994. At the time, the game's isometric 2D graphics were top-draw, and we can remember being enthralled by the then-impressive sprite animation. Take a look at the game these days and you're more likely to reach for the sick bag than gasp in amazement – but blowing up stuff with a helicopter thankfully hasn't gone out of fashion.

The *Strike* series spawned a number of sequels including *Jungle Strike* (which takes place in, er, the jungle), *Urban Strike* and ignored series relatives *Nuclear* and *Soviet Strike*. Despite the popularity of the series back in the days of old, there are currently no plans for a *Starsky & Hutch*-style revival, so get used to your DOS prompts.

"We're looking for geometric shapes..."

If you want more...

www.abandonia.com
Kosta Krauth's website is a treasure-trove of abandonware goodness.

www.the-underdogs.org
Underdogs is a podium for the unappreciated PC games of yesteryear.

www.reloaded.org
The site dedicated to freeware and retro rereleases.



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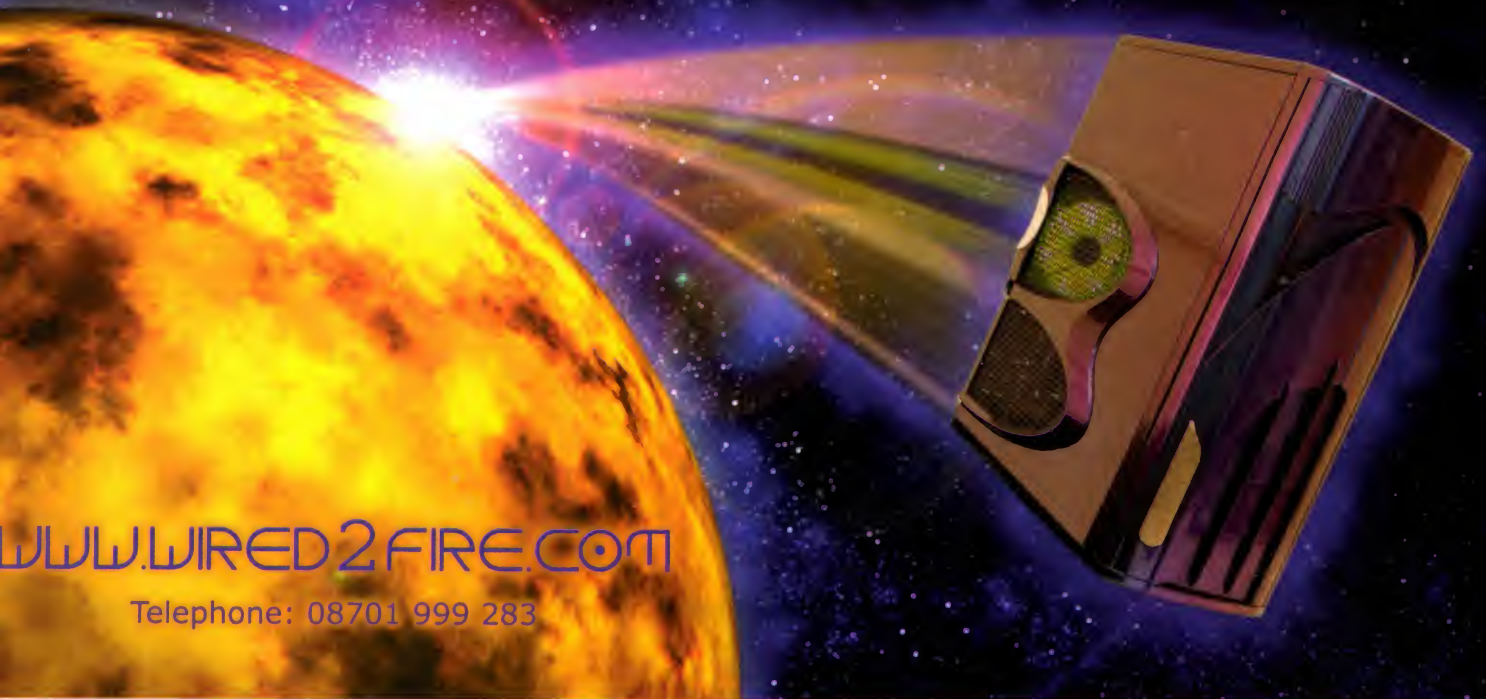
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STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill enters the terrifying world of *D&D Online: Stormreach*

ARE THERE ANY more shameful words in the English language than 'Dungeons & Dragons'? Possibly only *Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach*, the last bastion of ultra nerd-dom finally set free across the intergalactic superhighway. This is a low. Nevertheless, I'm going in deep, joined only by *PC ZONE* new boy Steve Hogarty. It's debatable what's more tragic: that he gave up university for this, or that I graduated. Anyway, it's probably only a matter of time before this becomes 'Steve Hogarty's NeverQuest', so he might as well get the practice in.

A meeting time is agreed, so I hastily select my character, opting for the bard in tribute to the staggeringly unhinged Reality Check feature of a few years ago in which I ran round a series of caves wearing a smock and playing a recorder at grown men dressed as monsters. Note to self: start writing the book.

In time-honoured fashion, I decide to call my character Steve Hill in order to attract any passing readers. However, it appears that the name has already been taken, which is either a harmless coincidence or deeply sinister. Given that I was recently accosted by a NeverQuest fan while at a urinal, I worryingly suspect the latter.

As an alternative, I attempt to call myself The Real Steve Hill, which comes out as Therealsteve Hill. Appropriately, this makes me sound a bit ethereal. With a fetching shade of purple hair, and armed with my trusty lute – which can apparently twist the minds of the most dangerous foes – I'm under way.

DRINK

Encouragingly I find myself in a pub, where, I attempt to meet up with Hogarty, aka Fargloss McIrish. However, there's no sign of him, despite the fact that we can chat to each other. Finally resorting to mobile phone, we establish that we're in different pubs, so I jump on the nearest boat and set sail for Stormreach Harbour.

Pulling into dock, I see him waiting silently for me, a hulking green Warforged, whatever that is.

"I can see you," I yell.

"You took your time," replies Fargloss, somewhat insolently. Fair enough, he's young, he's nervous and he's playing *Dungeons & Dragons* with his hero, but there's no need to be rude.

"You ugly f***er," I greet him, accurately, and we head straight for The Wavecrest Tavern.

"Check out that twat on the bar," says Fargloss, showing no kinship with

his fellow Warforged who's performing an elaborate moondance.

DRINK

Ignoring the sideshow, I try to get a drink, but the barman promises me a square meal if I can bring up a cask of Old Sully's Grog from the cellar. It sounds like the kind of Real Ale swill quaffed by my fellow lower division football fans, but I put my prejudices aside and agree to the task. I've scarcely got my bearings when I'm attacked by a kobold. No idea what it is, but a couple of swipes from my sword and the beast is felled.

Back upstairs, Fargloss is mooching around the bar on his own, so I foolishly suggest that he comes up with a quest for us. He promptly takes me to the Ominous Sewer to seek the alchemists' healing elixir, where we come under attack from a pair of robot dogs. I hate dogs of all kinds, and have no qualms about putting these metallic curs to the sword, but not before one of them spews on my fighting buddy. As Fargloss pitifully points out: "He got sick on me."

There's no sign of the elusive elixir, but after wading neck-high through a river of shit, we somehow find ourselves in a rudimentary library, where we're informed 'a battered Warforged stares directly

ahead, its eyes devoid of intelligence'. Said moronic Warforged then delivers a nonsensical riddle and suggests that we pull one of four levers.

FECK

"I'm shit at riddles," says Fargloss, helpfully. Taking a punt on the nearest one, I give it a tug, only to be informed 'as the lever clicks you hear a scorpion burrow through the floor'.

"You have chosen poorly," says the dim-witted Warforged. "Ha ha, *Indiana Jones* quote," says the Irish Warforged.

Meanwhile, the aforementioned scorpion proceeds to take great bites out of me while Fargloss casually looks on. Annoyingly, the second lever I pull yields the same result, and astonishingly so does the third. Fighting for my life, I hear the idiotic Warforged announce: "You have chosen wisely." Out of the corner of my eye I see Fargloss pull the remaining lever to claim the spoils as I take my dying breath.

"See, that's how you do it," he smugly announces. "Can you heal me?" I ask, somewhat incongruously, considering that I'm dead. "Umm, I don't think so," replies the hapless Irishman.

"Then this is over." **PCZ**



Bet he cheats at eye-spy.

With a fetching shade of purple hair and armed with my trusty lute, I'm ready

"Hold perfectly still, my armpit's stuck on your shoulder again."



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"The further I went the more my clothes came off," explains *Will Porter* to a concerned member of the constabulary

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THERE IS NO perfect *Prince Of Persia* game. But if all three could be melted, mixed together and served bubbling hot to gamers of high taste, the resulting fondue would be the template for the best third-person action-adventure ever. The story, setting and dialogue of *The Sands Of Time* rubbing shoulders with the intensity and action of *Warrior Within* and the stylish licks of *The Two Thrones*: a rare glimpse of perfection. Unfortunately though, this (well priced) compilation is the closest you'll get – and any idealist melding of the triptych will have to happen in the confines of your head.

I'm not saying any of these games are bad – my outspoken love of the series

has reached worrying levels on many occasions – but only a fool would claim that each game doesn't have its own share of brickbats and bouquets.

PAST VICTORY

For example, they say you can never go back, and with *The Sands Of Time* it's true. Since its release, whenever it's come up in conversation I've banged my fist on the table and declared my undying allegiance. I adore its structure, its characters, its clever dialogue, its wonderfully witty ending, that bit where it all goes dreamy and Farah is giggling and naked in a hot-tub – all of it. Apart from the combat – which unfortunately is where the 'never going back' bit comes in.



With all that sand-letting, he's essentially a taxidermist in reverse.



Rampant sexy bottoms...

...And an altogether more innocent age.

What other third-person action series has garnered so much emotional engagement?

As each iteration of Nu-POP has emerged, improved combat and ever-more involving puzzles have increased alongside the Prince's testosterone levels. It's an obvious thing to say, perhaps, but when all three games are laid alongside each other in a (cost-effective) triple-pack such as this, then one of my favourite games of all time starts feeling remarkably dated.

There are probably just as many rolling spiky log traps in *Two Thrones* as there are in *The Sands Of Time*, but by the time the third entry in the series rolled around, it just feels like the developers had picked up a few more tricks and situations to use them in. Likewise, having sliced a zombie in two in *Warrior Within*, it's hard to go back to the constant 'stand-next-to-wall' and 'do-spinny-attack-from-wall' battle tactic of the Prince's first outing.

You see, by the time we hit 2004's *Warrior Within*, much of the essential goodness of our previously much-loved Prince had been stripped – along with the now bare bottoms of the various sexy goth chicks that he has to battle while

presumably struggling with a fledgling erection. All of a sudden it's "You bitch!" and big-breasted vampires making sex noises as they bite your strapping neck to the loud rawk of Godsmack – not the Prince we fell in love with the first time round at all. He remains, however, a Prince with a much more dynamic and exhilarating fighting system and a far more exciting tang to his every move.

REGAL SITTING

We continue on into *The Two Thrones* – an excellent game that covers a few bases in mixing the distinctive individual charms of its forbears, but loses a few marks in my book with its silly stealth kills, needless chariot racing and over-fed bosses. While certainly the most all-inclusive POP package of them all, it just isn't that ultimate POP game I've been praying for all these years – it's good, but gets no slow-motion time-twirling cigar.

I'm a picky one – I've just ground one of my favourite game series into fine powder and seem not to care a whit. But I do, I really do – the fact that I can pick

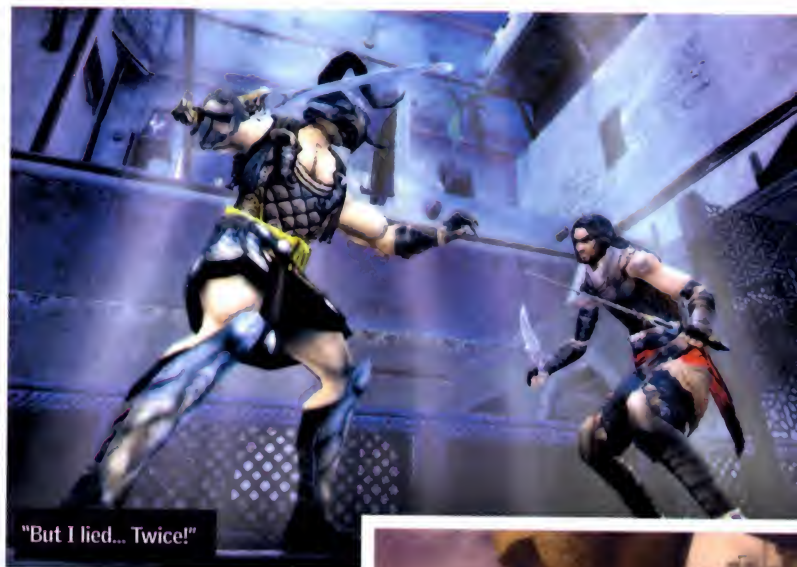
Straggly hair signals conflict.



Prince At The Pictures

The Sands Of Time goes Hollywood

We're not the only ones who recognise the story-telling ingenuity of *The Sands Of Time*, nor the only ones who admire its bickering leads and neat ending. Jerry Bruckheimer loved it too – which is why *The Sands Of Time* is being dusted down for cinematic greatness and is currently in pre-production, with POP scribe Jordan Mechner and *The Day After Tomorrow* writer Jeffrey Nachmanoff both said to be attached to the project. Whether our back page of yesteryear will prove uncannily prescient remains to be seen...



"But I lied... Twice!"

apart these three games to such a degree and still hold a gigantic roman candle for them being perhaps the greatest triumph of all. What other third-person action series has garnered such emotional engagement? What else has made gamers gnash their teeth with its shifting directions and whine about the way they've changed stuff? The reinvention of *Prince Of Persia* has proved a great success, and the fact I complain about its minutiae to such an extent while disregarding such matters in your *Tomb Raiders* or your *BloodRaynes* is a resounding testament to that fact.

Should you buy this? Of course – but play through them in order, shut your eyes during the boob-ridden bits of *Warrior Within* and when Farah returns in *The Two Thrones*, do an impromptu jig around your desk. I know I did.



THE RAVAGES OF TIME

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES	1st
PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN	2nd
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	3rd

As each iteration passes, more and more gets added and it gets harder to go back. We love *The Sands Of Time* the most – but the combat is getting really rosey, even we have to admit.

SUPERTEST

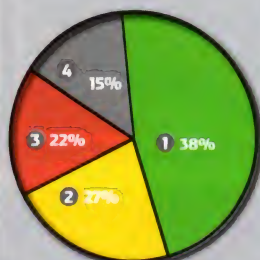
THE BEST ROLE-PLAYING GAME

It's time to roll the dice and pick out the RPG grandmasters



YOUR VIEW

Last month's subject: which *Half-Life* bit was the best?



SURFACE TENSION 1st

TRAM RIDE 2nd

RAVENHOLM 3rd

SUPER GRAVITY GUN SECTION 4th

Garethhale: "Super gravity gun – arranging corpses in promiscuous positions has never been so easy."

Kunitoki: "Ravenholm; when you realise how little ammo you have and how everyone's closing in on you, it's satisfyingly scary. The super-grav-gun is a close second."

Captain_Moquelette: "The opening bit of *HL2* is the best bit. The sense of oppression and intrigue, everything is perfect. They could make a whole game based around me exploring, being oppressed and running away and I'd buy it twice over."

PetePointon: "When you're skimming along a channel in the jetboat and a giant factory chimney sprouts from the scenery and suddenly, unexpectedly, that vast pile of masonry begins to topple right across your path – a truly cinematic moment."

THIS MONTH WE found an excuse to talk about *Oblivion* for 20 minutes and get paid for it to boot. The game has encapsulated our lives so much that we often turn up to work still wearing the discarded pizza boxes from the night before, mumbling something about slaying goblins until slapped by the nearest altogether more sane person. Or so Clare says.

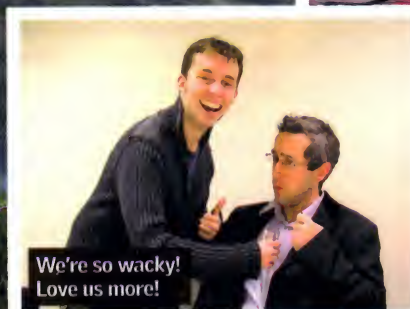
Sadly, at the time of this month's Supertest, a portion of the *PC ZONE* team were still hacking at obese rodents with their newbie swords, so we had to call in the emergency powers of RPG godfather Dan Griliopoulos, the man who could thwart the entire *PC ZONE* team in an explosion of stats and numbers, to cast his decisive and wise opinion.

But it wasn't all about *Oblivion*, oh no; apparently there are other role-playing games out there, ones like *Neverwinter Nights*, *Deus Ex* and *KOTOR*, which Will pronounces as if it were some kind of Korean cleaning product. We attempted to discuss these other glimmering

moments of RPGs past, but *Oblivion's* influence cast an ever-present shadow over our proceedings and easily cleaned up in our post-debate vote.

In a quick and decisive verdict, everyone voted for *Oblivion*, except for Andy who voted for *KOTOR*, because he's a rebel without a cause with a fancy for lightsabers. You can hear the whole thigh-slappingly good debate via the MP3 on our DVD, which, when loaded onto your favourite MP3 player, will provide approximately 20 minutes of insight and hilarity.

If for some strange, bizarre reason you don't think *Oblivion* deserves the Supertest accolade of 'Best RPG Ever™', then head over to the *PC ZONE* forum (www.pczone.co.uk) and vote for your favourite number-crunching goblin game in the ever-present Supertest poll. Off you go then. **PCZ**





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FROM THE CREATORS OF

PCZONE

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Welcome to **PC ZONE's** Caesarian section!
We talk to The Creative Assembly to discover
why there's no place like Rome...

AFTER OUR WORLD-EXCLUSIVE first-look at the new *Medieval 2: Total War* a few issues ago, we thought it'd be a good time to ask The Creative Assembly about its greatest RTS release so far – *Rome: Total War*. For the glory of Caesar and his empire, we've enlisted the help of Mike Brunton (designer and writer, left) and Mike Simpson (creative director, right), who will now battle to the death in gladiatorial combat for your amusement. Oh, and talk about the making of a real-time strategy classic...



The semi-naked army proved to be a ratings winner.

01 GAME PHILOSOPHY: Simpson: "Our philosophy was pretty simple. After *Shogun* and the original *Medieval*, we knew we had a formula for *Total War* that worked and proved popular and fun. We wanted to create technology that would allow us to make a bigger and better *Total War* experience, to move away from the Risk-style campaign map and introduce a 3D version that was linked more closely to the battles you fought in real-time." Brunton: "The word constantly bandied around was 'epic'. *Rome* had to be 'epic' in that kind of square-jawed Charlton Heston mode, and the move to 3D meant that was a realistic goal. All of a sudden, it wasn't impossible to have a few thousand blokes fighting over the walls and in city streets while artillery rained death on the enemy."

"Rome benefits from historical detail – we couldn't have invented anything as odd as the flaming pigs!"

Mike Brunton, designer/writer, *R:TW*

02 HISTORY LESSON: Brunton: "*Rome* definitely benefits from all the bits of historical detail we managed to squeeze in, and not always in the obvious places. For example, some of the vices and retainers that generals can collect are rooted in the historical research – although some of the Egyptian ones were just too rude. The technology tree in the game is solidly based on research (but again, properly abstracted). On-screen messages tend to use an appropriate tone that came out of the historical research, and the research helps the immersion factor in the game, that's for sure. Plus, we couldn't have invented anything quite as odd and brutal as the flaming pigs!"

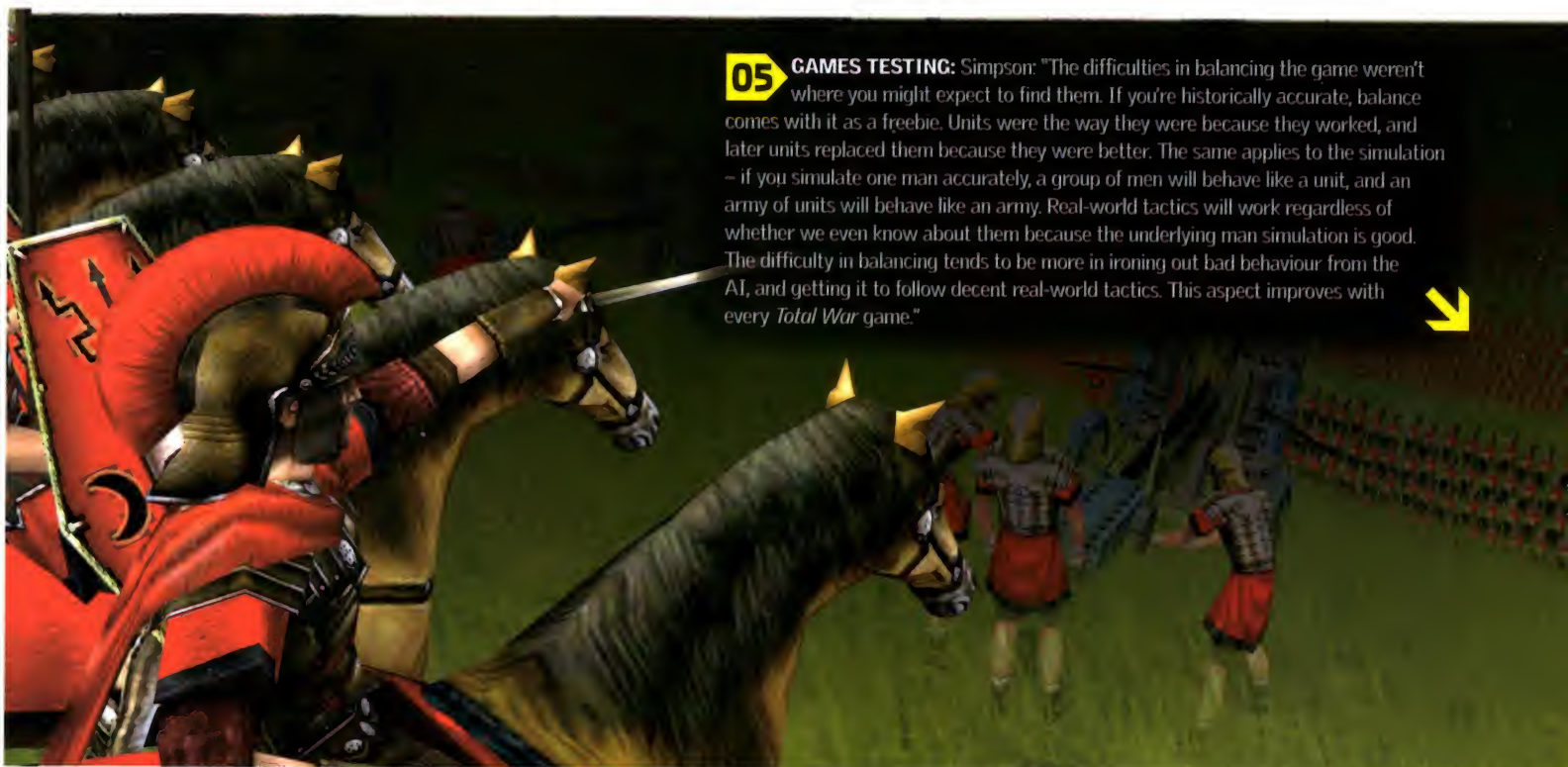


03 FANBOYS: Simpson: "We're lucky enough to have a zealous community of fans who're never shy at offering feedback and ideas. That's obviously a massive advantage for us when we sit down and design future titles. That said, we've been creating *Total War* games for many years now, and in that time we've collected and discussed thousands of ideas – so it's actually not that often that the fans come up with an angle or idea that we haven't already thrown around the room in our design meetings."

Brunton: "Our fans are a passionate bunch. The designers here regularly spend time looking at the forums, to gauge the temperature and assess the mood of the people playing the game. We also play the 'What would the forums think about...' game in design meetings too. Some stuff gets put aside or changed because we don't think the players would necessarily see it as right for a *Total War* title."

04 ALL AT SEA: Simpson: "Adding naval combat to a *Total War* game is a huge task. It would actually be a third game within the *Total War* remit if you like, and would demand its own engine to implement properly. When we tackle naval warfare we want to ensure we achieve the kind of result that fits snugly alongside the existing elements of the *Total War* games. It needs to be authentic, work in conjunction with the land game and above all be fun to play. Call us perfectionists, but we just didn't want to include a half-baked attempt at 3D naval combat for *Rome*."

Brunton: "He really is a perfectionist, you know. It's frightening."



05 GAMES TESTING: Simpson: "The difficulties in balancing the game weren't where you might expect to find them. If you're historically accurate, balance comes with it as a freebie. Units were the way they were because they worked, and later units replaced them because they were better. The same applies to the simulation – if you simulate one man accurately, a group of men will behave like a unit, and an army of units will behave like an army. Real-world tactics will work regardless of whether we even know about them because the underlying man simulation is good. The difficulty in balancing tends to be more in ironing out bad behaviour from the AI, and getting it to follow decent real-world tactics. This aspect improves with every *Total War* game."



The second casualty of war: men in striped trousers.

06 TIME COMMANDERS: Brunton: "Lion TV had seen *Medieval: Total War* and came to talk to us about using that game to create *Time Commanders*. We took them into our super-secret development facility and said, 'Well, if you like that...' They were hooked on *Rome*, even in its early stages. It was like stepping up from a decaf latte to a triple espresso. They shuddered with delight – probably – although they did shake for the rest of the day and talk very quickly.

"Contrary to some accounts, *Time Commanders* did use *Rome* code pretty much 'as is', with tweaks for different troop types and camera controls. Being a TV show, they wanted to be able to move a virtual camera about inside the game world and send it anywhere. The original *Rome* code didn't allow this, but the TV version did. Other than little things like that, they got the game and fun was had watching some surprising sets of people take to command like ducks to water."



Dumbo goes to war.

07 FUNNY MOMENTS: Brunton: "Funny like how? Like I'm a clown? Like I amuse you? Much of the time, game development is not funny. It's like working in a Siberian salt mine, only without the nice décor, friendly guards, well-mannered colleagues, good food, nice weather, fashionable apparel, gratitude of people sprinkling your product on their chips and sense of achievement in a job well done. We do occasionally smile, but only when no-one's looking."

"Game development is not funny. It's like working in a Siberian salt mine, but without the nice décor, good food and nice weather..."

Mike Brunton, designer and writer, *Rome: Total War*



"Hang on, I've got sand in my eye."

"You should have gone before we left."



08 OMISSIONS: Simpson: "There are always omissions. We maintain a wish-list throughout the project, and features move back and forth from the project to the wish-list as the project progresses, the game develops and priorities and needs change. Unfortunately, we have to call a halt at some point (or we'd never finish), and there's always loads of things on the list. They're for the next one."

Brunton: "As Mike says, there's a lot of stuff on the list. This is the essential characteristic that makes it a list, as opposed to, say, an Agatha Christie mystery. Lists have no plot structure or valid character development. Many lists also include the words 'toilet rolls', although this wasn't a feature to be added to *Rome*. The Romans used sponges, you know. See how that historical research pays off in unexpected ways?"

09 EXPANSION PACKS: Simpson: "We always look to evolve our games using the expansion packs, and to make sure we create an offering that doesn't merely add a few units and factions, but also offers a new approach to the core game. Those Barbarians and their unique approach to travel and tourism certainly gave us just that. The Alexander campaign was always something we wanted to include in the *Rome: Total War* package. The story and battles just fit so well with the game, and we just felt it would have been unforgivable to move on from *Rome* without giving Alexander a go. It also gave us a great excuse to meet Brian Blessed by getting him in to do the voiceover – something I think you guys appreciated judging by the attention he got in your magazine (issue 166)."

"I'm looking for Tony. Have you seen Tony?"



10 VENI VIDI VICI: Simpson: "There are always things we'd like to have got in, that we know aren't quite perfect, or that don't work as well as we imagined they would – but we're pretty pragmatic about it. It's better to get a great game out into the world and let people play it rather than sit on it for another year and tweak it to a very slightly better state of perfection. When you look at the average review scores, *Rome* is closer to perfection than any other strategy game bar one, and we have that one clearly in our sights."

Brunton: "Definitely. There are always bits that you'd like to change, given half a chance to go back, but the overall thing is actually rather splendid – in a quietly understated British sort of stiff-upper-lip fashion. You get the Roman world in a box, with enormous battles. Then you add on a metric shedload of extras in the expansion pack – another developer might even have done that as a complete game. What's not to like?"





DEMIS HASSABIS

*Jamie Sefton visits the hidden underground base of the creator of **Evil Genius***

Why Do We Care?

Child prodigy Demis Hassabis (at 12 years old he was the best chess player of his age in the world) is the man behind the recently-closed Elixir Studios, who produced the ambitious political strategy simulation *Republic: The Revolution* (issue 132, 88%) and tongue-in-cheek supervillain RTS *Evil Genius* (issue 147, 84%). Demis began his games career at age 15, working with Peter Molyneux at Bullfrog in his summer holidays, play-testing *Populous*, level-designing on *Syndicate* and co-creating the classic *Theme Park*.

What's He Doing Now?

After the closure of Elixir Studios last year, Demis has taken a rather leftfield turn into the world of neuro-science research, investigating the human mind for the advancement of artificial intelligence to create more emotional, interesting games. Demis is also a backer of the games-betting site www.prizefight.co.uk, and is working on a "non-traditional games project" which he promises we'll hear about in a year or so.



Remember These? DEMIS'S DIAMONDS



THEME PARK: Hassabis's first game (in 1994) had eccentric humour and unique gameplay and is still fondly remembered.



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION: Five years in development, this was an ambitious 'government sim' set in a fictional Soviet country.



EVIL GENIUS: Elixir's RTS put you in the shoes of a budding evil dictator. Draped in '60s charm, it won critical acclaim and respectable sales.



BLUE VAULT: Revealed exclusively by PC ZONE, this future-set RTS described as 'X-COM meets Men In Black in 3D' was never released.

Q Can you tell us about the creation of *Theme Park*?

A I was a wide-eyed 16-year-old when they were about two months into it. I remember first seeing *Populous* graphics showing off what the game idea for *Theme Park* might be – it seemed like a cool project. My responsibility was the simulation part, and having never really written anything like that before, or of that size or complexity, I was pleased that I managed to cope and do a reasonably good job.

What did your university friends think of your success when *Theme Park* was released?

They thought I was kidding, but I managed to get hold of a copy and they saw my name – although they did suspect I'd hacked it or something at first. They eventually believed me though.

Did you always have an idea of setting up your own company?

Yes – I was going to do it straight after university, but at that point Peter Molyneux had sold Bullfrog to EA and was looking to start something new. So it seemed like the timing was perfect to go back with him and help set up Lionhead. *Black & White* – although still an embryonic concept – already sounded pretty cool in terms of the AI needed and it was something I was interested in working on.



What you gonna do?

"There was enough stuff for another two or three *Evil Genius* games"

Republic: The Revolution was the first game for Elixir – why did it take so long to develop?

With hindsight, I think it's clear that we bit off more than we could chew at the time. We tried to build this incredibly ambitious graphics engine, plus create some fairly insane AI technology for living, breathing cities, as well as – the thing I underestimated the most – boiling down a topic as massive as politics into a game. Given the trials and tribulations along the way, we produced an original and entertaining game. The idea of *Republic* was to make you feel like you were a revolutionary such as Che Guevara, but I guess we didn't get far enough down the line to convey that fully.

Your next release was *Evil Genius*...

After the seriousness of *Republic*, it was nice to work on something so tongue-in-cheek. We started and finished the game in two years – but we had hundreds of ideas, some of which would have taken years to implement. We sensibly decided to break it up into bite-sized chunks so that if it was successful, we could implement some of the more ambitious ideas in the sequel – such as having multiplayer *Evil Genius*, deathmatch or planning super-agent teams to raid a hidden base, which would've been a bit like *X-COM* or *Commandos*. There was probably enough stuff for two or three other *Evil Genius* games, let alone one...

So what happened with *Blue Vault*?

We took it round to some publishers, who seemed


interested – there were various licences they were looking at to put on top of it, including at one point, *Men In Black*, which would have fitted quite well into the storyline. I don't think it was because it was a strategy game, but more that it wasn't a sequel or a proven IP or licence, which meant it was riskier – in the end, we just couldn't get a publisher to bite on it.

How do you feel about the closure of Elixir now?

I feel really proud of what we achieved and it was done with the minimum of pain and fuss in the way that the team was treated – everyone was paid in full, for example. We tried our best on all the games we produced and had a couple of other games in development that were looking really promising – such as *Dreams*, which I unfortunately can't talk about as the IP has been sold to another company.

Is there still a place for fun, strategy/tycoon games?

The *Movies* was utterly fantastic, but hasn't set the retail world alight...

It was worrying to see that because *The Movies* was a really good execution and a brilliant idea, so I don't really know why it hasn't done better. On *Evil Genius* for example, the marketing was pretty much non-existent, which obviously hurt it. On the other hand, maybe there isn't the market for those types of games any more on PC – I don't know. It's a shame if not. The industry seems to be going through a major transition, so it'll be interesting to see what kind of games are still viable in the next few years. 

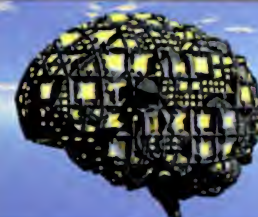
Three things Demis loves



Poker: Demis loves a flutter and is an experienced player.



Football: especially *Pro Evo*. He's also a scouser at heart.



AI: the possibilities for the advancement of videogames.

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Hardware Photography In-house
Origination ColourFlow 020 7323 0022
Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution Marketforce (UK)

GATHERERS

Publisher James Ashton-Tyler
Group Publishing Director Mia Walter
James Group Ad Manager Darren Gratton
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distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low
se Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street,
London, SE1 9LS. Tel 0207 633 3300

Printed in the UK by Southernprint

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the sister's birthday - happy 44th, Liz!



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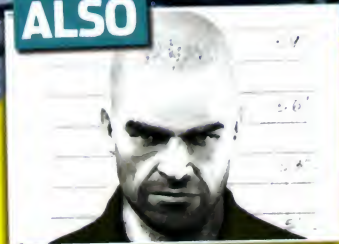
PC gaming's greatest real-time strategy series is back! **PC ZONE** reveal the brand new title with stunning screenshots and essential game revelations! Unmissable!



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Exclusive! We're the first magazine to
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ALSO



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We fly to Shanghai to sneak
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Exclusive review and
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PLUS! Phil Wand's latest hardware news and
reviews, Dominik Diamond gets religious and Steve
Hill delves deeper into *Dungeons & Dragons: Online*!

DOMINIK DIAMOND

This month I've been living a double-life as a superhero in women's underwear...

A basic law of superheroes is that the breasts have to be bigger than the heads



MOST OF THIS month has been spent changing lady's pants in the company of a seven-

year-old girl. Don't worry, I haven't turned into Gary Glitter. Rather, I've been playing *City Of Heroes* with my daughter.

I thought it was about time I introduced her to PC games, and specifically role-playing games. Not because she has a beard and only changes her pants once a month, but because even though we've nearly completed *The Simpsons: Road Rage* on Xbox, she spends hours walking around Springfield talking aimlessly to the characters. I got her *Nintendogs* and a DS for Christmas and she has ten bitches on the go – far more than I've ever managed.

It took us a while to get into *City Of Heroes*, mainly because we spent two weeks just designing superheroes and dressing them up. She initially refused to accept the basic law of superheroes – their breasts *have* to be bigger than their heads. This is especially true with male ones.

I also set up one of my characters when I came home drunk, then forgot about it. So the next day had to suffer questions like: "What are Green Fannybaws?"

THE FAMILY WAY

However, what started off as a bonding exercise soon became a nightmare. Basically, we have differing views on how superheroes should behave. She wanted to ignore the endemic low-level street crime and insisted on befriending other costume clad chums; becoming a sidekick and joining gangs for good.

On the other hand, I believe the truly great superheroes are loners. I also became obsessed with killing *every* punk on the streets. This is only partly down to my own views on law and order, and partly my wimpy way of playing RPGs – build up experience points on low levels so you don't get fisted when you meet bad Necromancers.

Things were made worse by the fact that I'd started making this documentary for Channel 5 in which I try to find god. This was a fairly time-consuming task,

because he was being a furtive little sod. As a result, I told Molly how to log into the game and left it up to her, thinking she'd soon get bored and go back to *Nintendogs*.

After two weeks like this I sat down for a session and she laughed as I booted up the tutorial level for a refresher. "Don't worry dad, I know everything," she cackled, swatting me aside like I was nothing but a KFC popcorn chicken ball.

Her fingers became a blur as she called up her level 10 superhero Lady Deth Strike (showing a remarkable grasp of metal/rap illiteracy for the blondest, most middle-class seven-year-old in the UK). Turns out, she's in all manner of pseudo-socialist superhero collectives, can light a bad guy's cigar from the next postal code without so much as singeing a molecule of his stubble and now genuinely plays quicker than I can even think. I realised I couldn't allow that.

So I banned her from playing it by telling her that all games turn children into raving psychotic violent junkie chavs according to the *Daily Mail*. The ban will end when Green Fannybaws reaches level 11. **PCZ**



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